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PHILOSOPHY  
COMPARATIVE STUDY

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M RAFIQUE





**INDIAN AND MUSLIM  
PHILOSOPHY :  
A Comparative Study**

**M. RAFIQUE**

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TO  
MY WIFE : NASEEM



## PREFACE

Concurrence of thoughts in different minds which are separated by time and space is a queer fact of nature. Perhaps its justification lies in the truth that the human mind reacts in a similar way in similar circumstances. It is, therefore, not surprising that the two minds deriving their inspiration from two different cultural milieu arrive at the same truth. This fact has amply been demonstrated by rather a new discipline-Comparative Religion. The discipline, in its healthy attitude of mind, aims at a sympathetic understanding of different religions, philosophies and cultures. Beside being intellectually satisfying, this endeavour helps bring different peoples closer to one another and thus fosters good-will, harmony and peace in the society. It is in this earnest that the present series of essays has been written. The essays are largely introductory in nature. The aim is to make the reader further inquisitive to enter upon a deeper study of the subject.

I take this opportunity to thank my wife, Naseem, who is a constant source of inspiration to me in my endeavours. My sincere thanks are also due to Shri S.B. Nangia, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi for agreeing to publish this book so soon.

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# 1

## THE EARLY MUSLIM PHILOSOPHY

At the very outset, let us make it clear that the Muslim Philosophy is not synonymous with the philosophy of the Arabs. Also it is not synonymous with Islam either though the term 'Islamic philosophy' is now increasingly coming into vogue. It is a philosophy advocated by the Muslims regardless of their geographical affiliations. However, in this short essay, we are concerned with the first beginnings of Muslim Philosophy about two hundred years hence from the date of the advent of Islam. According to M.M. Sharif, Muslim Philosophy passed through the following phases in the course of its development: (a) Theologico-philosophical, (b) Mystical, (c) philosophical and scientific, (d) Middle Roaders, e.g., Al-Ghazali and Razi.<sup>1</sup> Evidently we will be concerned here with the first phase of the development of Muslim Philosophy.

To begin with, let us see in brief the then philosophical climate in which the first phase of Muslim Philosophy took its shape. Greek philosophy, specially the Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle was held in great esteem by both the Christian and Muslim thinkers of those days. However, pure Greek philosophy could not reach them. In fact, what they got in its place was the philosophy as interpreted by Plotinus (205-270 A.D.) and his disciples.

Thus, during 3rd century A.D., Alexandria became the seat of the philosophy which was coloured by foreign influences chiefly Neo-Platonic. O'Leary thinks these foreign influences might have

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1. M.M. Sharif : A History of Muslim Philosophy (Edited), 1961, p. 13.

included Indian influences as well.<sup>2</sup> During fourth century A.D., Nisibis in Syria also became a centre of Neo-Platonic philosophy. Here all work was done in Syriac for the benefit of the local inhabitants. During fifth century, the Nestorians and his followers gave a new impetus to this school at Nisibis by putting forward their own version of Christianity which was influenced a lot by Neo-Platonism. Much of the work of translating Neo-Platonic works into Syriac was done by these Nestorians and later on it were they who produced prolific Arabic translations from the Syriac. During the period, the main subjects of interest were philosophy, logic, theology, medicine, chemistry and astronomy.<sup>3</sup> Throughout these developments, an urge to harmonise religious doctrines with the demands of philosophy had been a marked feature of the day. It is on this point that O'Leary contends that there are hay-day of religion for some time and after that philosophy inevitably reasserts its power and the religious doctrines have to be re-cast to conform to it.<sup>4</sup> This was, in brief, the prevailing climate in which first Muslim conquests of Alexandria, Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia were made in quick succession and by 661, the Ummayyad dynasty of Arab rulers was established in Damascus. Basra, Kufa and Baghdad became the active centres of learning and Baghdad was made also the capital of the Abbasides' govt. in 762. It is in this way that the Muslims came in contact with the Greek philosophy. This contact and the first beginnings of the Muslim philosophy can best be described in R.A. Nicholson's words thus : "Muslim Theology, philosophy and science put forth their first luxuriant shoots on a soil which was saturated with Hellenistic culture."<sup>5</sup> However, it is to be asserted that Muslim Philosophy grew and developed as a result of its own inherent compulsions. Firstly, Islam always took a positive and empirical view of the universe by exhorting its followers to reflect over the nature of things and employ their faculty of understanding and reason. It was in consonant with this teaching of Islam that Muslims were first to develop inductive method and thus were the forerunners of modern sciences. Secondly, the people of diverse faiths and cultures came to the fold of Islam. It was natural that after the

2. De Lacy O'Leary : Arabic Thought and its place in History, London, 1922, p. 5.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

5. R.A. Nicholson : Mystics of Islam, London, 1914, p. 9.



initial fervour, they started to entertain doubts on various religious problems and the need arose to provide a rational base to them. In fact, the first philosophy in Islam came into being as a result of this endeavour on the part of the Muslim divines and hence their philosophy was called, 'Kalām' or science of reason through which these reconciliations between the demands of the reason and the Islamic doctrines were sought. In this way the first phase of Muslim Philosophy—Theologico-philosophical—is represented by these people of Kalām whose efforts led to the emergence of two distinct schools : Rationalist Kalām (Mu'tazilism) and Orthodox Kalām (Ash'arism or Muslim Scholasticism).

Having come across Greek sciences and philosophy, Muslims began to see problems in their own religion. According to Shahrīstānī,<sup>6</sup> there were four fundamental problems different solutions of which gave rise to different schools of Muslim thought : (a) The problem of freedom of the will, (b) The problem of the attributes of God, (c) The problem of demarcation between belief and action and (d) The dispute between Reason and Revelation. The two schools which we have named above are the result of different outlooks on these problems. Some thinkers tended to rationalize their religious doctrines and attached primary status to Reason as against Revelation or word of God. Yet others gave primary importance to Revelation as against Reason in their attempt to harmonise the two. These schools, as already said, are Mu'tazilism and Ash'arism respectively.

As regards the problem of freedom of the will, two mutually opposed schools—Jabrites and Qadrites—came into existence, one believing in the total pre-determinism and the other upholding complete freedom of the will.<sup>7</sup> Imām Hasan (d 110 A.H.) was a great scholar of Islam at Basra. He avoided extremes in the question of the will and had rationalistic tendencies. One day, while lecturing in the mosque at Basra, he was asked his opinion on the question whether those who commit great sin are to be regarded as Muslims or Non-Muslims. Before he could say anything, one of his pupils,

6. A.K. Shahrīstānī : *Kitab-al-Milal Wan-Nihal*.

7. Ma'bad al-Yuhānī (d. 80 A.H.) may be regarded as the first adherent of the Qadr.

Wāsil bin Atā (d. 131 A.H.) said that such persons were neither believers nor unbelievers. Thus, he came to differ from his teacher and began to expound his own views separately. Since he seceded from his teacher's class, he was called a Mu'tazilite (one who secedes) and his school was called Mu'tazilism.

### **Mu'tazilism**

As we have indicated before, this school in Muslim Philosophy is a rationalistic school. It stands for two main doctrines : (a) Divine Unity, and (b) Divine Justice.

In order to maintain unity of God, they believed that divine attributes are not apart from God's essence and are thus co-existing with God. He possesses no attributes existing eternally side by side with Him. They are included in his essence. God is omnipotent, omniscient or wise by virtue of His essence. He does not have these attributes apart from His essence. In being consistent with this doctrine, they denied the eternity of the Qur'an also in the present form *i.e.*, in Arabic words. According to them. "An eternal Qur'an was a second person of the Godhead and God was not absolutely one." It was under this spirit that Wāsil bin Atā declared, "He who affirms an eternal quality beside God, affirms two Gods."<sup>8</sup>

From their second doctrine—Divine Justice—they drew the corollary that God cannot punish man without endowing him with the freedom of the will. Since God holds human beings responsible for their actions, His justice proves that he has made man free. Man can make or mar his fortune. It is within the power of the human beings to follow the path of virtue or vice. The Mutazilites find support for their doctrine of freedom of the will in the following verses of the Qur'an :

"Whoever acts virtuously, does so for himself," (XLI, 46)

"Nothing belongs to man save what he strives for," (XLI, 40).

<sup>8</sup>. De Lacy O'Leary : Arabic Thought and its Place in History, London, 1939, p. 84.



There is yet another doctrine of this school. According to it, Reason is the true criterion of good and evil. This problem has been a cause of much difference amongst Muslim thinkers. The meaning of good and evil has been regarded synonymous with merit and defect, profit and loss and reward and punishment. Thinkers disagree as to the fact that Reason can be the criterion of rewardable and punishable acts. However, Mu'tazilites hold that Reason can justly be said to be the criterion of rewardable and punishable acts. Revelation only confirms what Reason dictates.<sup>9</sup>

Mu'tazilites also believe that God cannot entrust man with tasks which are beyond his powers. This is because God is just and wise. God cannot also act irrationally. Similarly, they hold that it is impossible for God to reward the evil-doers or punish the righteous. So far as Ash'arism is concerned, it takes just the reverse stand on the problems just stated.

The chief exponents of the school beside Wāsil bin Atā, were Abu, Hudhail al-Allaf of Basra (d. 226 A.H.), Ibrahim bin Sayyar al-Nazzam (d.231 AH) and his pupil, Al-Jāhiz (d. 255 A.H.). During the reign of Umayyads, this school was able to muster the support of the court, particularly during the reign of the caliph, Yazid. An impetus was given to this school by the second Abbaside Caliph, al-Mansūr (136-158 A.H.) Muslim divines also found the views of Mu'tazilites of great help in defending Islam against the attacks of the critics of Islam. Upto 4th century A.H. there were many commentaries on Qur'an justifying its doctrines on rational grounds. Two more caliphs of Baghdad after Al-Māmūn, al Mu'tasim and Al-Wāthiq also patronized this school. But after the death of Al-Wāthiq, almost all caliphs were opposed to Mu'tazilism and some of them persecuted the Mu'tazilites for being rationalists. With the result, within 150 years, Mu'tazilism was completely wiped out from the Muslim empire and its place was taken by the scholasticism of Abul Hasan Al Ash'ari. So much so that the Mu'tazilites were ultimately regarded as outside the general Muslim religious faith. It is on this point that De Boer remarks : ". . . . Pious needs proved stronger than logical conclusions. . . . the communities of men are more ready to accept a religion sent down to them from on high than an enlightened explanation of it."<sup>10</sup>

9. De Lacy O'Leary : Arabic Thought and its place in History, London, 1939, p. 124.

10. De Boer : The History of Philosophy in Islam, 1967, pp. 48-49.

### Ash'arism

Ash'arism developed as a result of reaction against the rationalism of the Mu'tazilites. There were mainly three factors in the development of this school : First, Muslim divines were afraid that Islam may lose its binding force in the face of rationalism. Secondly, the non-rationalists were persecuted during the reign of Mānūn and his immediate successors. Thirdly, the efforts of Ikhwān-us-Safā (Brethren of Purity) at reconciliation between Reason and Revelation were also responsible for the development of Ash'arism. The stage for a reaction to rationalism was set. Abul Hasan al-Ash'ari (b. 260 A.H.) who was a disciple of Al-Jabbāi, the last Mu'tazilite teacher, renounced Mu'tazilism and started to toe the orthodox lines. This development followed an episode between Al-Jabbāi and Al-Ash'ari which runs thus :

“Ash'ari proposed to Jabbāi the case of three brothers, one of whom was a true believer, virtuous and pious; the second an infidel a debauchee and a reprobate; and the third an infant ; they all died, and Ash'ari wished to know what had become of them. To this Jabbāi answered : The virtuous brother holds a high station in Paradise, the infidel is in the depths of hell and the child is among those who have obtained 'salvation,' 'Suppose now', said Ash'ari, 'That the child wishes to ascend to the place occupied by his virtuous brother, would he be allowed to do so ? 'No', replied Jabbāi, 'it would be said to him : Thy brother arrived at this place through his numerous works of obedience towards God, and thou hast no such works to set forward,' 'Suppose then' said Ash'ari, that the child says : 'That is not my fault, you did not let me live long enough, neither did you give me the means of proving my obedience,' 'In that case,' answered Jabbāi, 'the Almighty would say : I knew that if I had allowed thee to live, thou wouldst have been disobedient and incurred the severe punishment (of Hell). I, therefore, acted for thy advantage,' 'Well,' said Ash'ari, and suppose the infidel brother were to say : O God of the universe, since you knew what awaited him, you must have known what awaited me, why then did you act for his advantage and not for mine ?' Jabbāi had not a word to offer in reply.<sup>11</sup> The strain of the episode is that religious matters cannot be decided by reason or intellect alone.

11. R.A. Nicholson : Literary History of the Arabs, p. 377.

In this way a new orthodox school came into existence. This school was called Ash'arism after the name of its founder, Al-Ash'ari. According to him, the attributes of God are neither included nor excluded from God's essence, they are co-eternal with God. So far as their conception is concerned; the attributes are outside of God, and so far as their application is concerned; they are included in God's essence. Thus to them, there is no contradiction in their doctrine of attributes.

So far as the question of freedom of the will is concerned, this school believes in the theory of acquisition (Kasb) which implies that although God has pre-destined human actions, yet man has been given some power of actualising those actions. In this way, the origination of an act depends on God whereas its completion depends partially on man. Thus, this school denies absolute freedom of the will to man. Man has got simply a power of appropriation or acquisition. Every action is pre-arranged by God to be performed by a particular person. Man's intention to complete any action holds him responsible for his deeds.

The question of the freedom of will has always defied solution. In Qur'an, we find both kinds of verses—one affirming freedom of the will and the other denying any freedom to human beings. We quote the following verses of the Qur'an which favour predestination :-

“No misfortune happens either on earth or in yourselves but we made it,—it was in the book”. (57 : 22).

“Everything have we set down in the clear book of our decrees,” (36 : 1).

Some of the other main doctrines of Ash'arism may be mentioned here : The Qur'an is uncreated and eternal; good and evil come into being by the will of God; God will revive the dead on the Day of Judgment; the virtuous will have a vision of God in the heaven. Since the teachings of this school were in harmony with the orthodox theologians' views, many divines welcomed this school. It was successful in winning the patronage of Sultan Alaf Arsalan and



his minister, Nizam-al-Mulk. The majority of Sunni Muslims all over the world became the followers of this school.

Ash'arism gives priority, as we have said before, to Revelation over Reason. Not only this, it invented a science of Reason (Ilm-ul-Kalām) to defend the revelation. Imām Al-Ghazāli was a well-known exponent of this school.

The Ash'arites hold that although Reason can be arbiter so far as merit and defect and profit and loss are concerned but in determining the reward or punishment of an action in the world hereafter, only Revelation can be of help. According to the Ash'arites, the Mu'tazilites limit the power of God in believing that God cannot impose upon human beings tasks which are beyond their power. They believe that God can do anything but in practice, God does not impose any such tasks upon human beings. Similarly they believe that God can act irrationally also but in practice he does not do so. In the same veins, they hold that it is not obligatory on God to reward the virtuous and punish the wicked. He can punish whom He wills. He can reward whom He wills. But the Mu'tazilites hold that in all such matters, God cannot act contrary to reason. We come to the end of the discussion of this school with a remark of De Boer regarding Al-Ash'ari: "This was Al-Ash'ari (873-935) who understood how to render to God the things that are God's and to man the things that are Man's."

The Ash'arites proved the existence of God through the fact of change of the substances. Since they change, they cannot be permanent and eternal. This leads to the conception of an eternal and unchanging creator. The argument was later on based on the inference of necessary existence of God from the contingent character of the world.

This brings us to the end of a brief survey of the two schools of the theologico—philosophical phase of the Muslim Philosophy. Evidently the two schools differed mainly with regard to the primacy given to reason or to revelation in comparison with each other. Though the scholastic school emphasised the inadequacy of reason in religious matters, man's fall-back on reason for a reasoned guidance in his life will always be inevitable and, as remarked earlier in the

words of O'Leary, philosophy will reassert its power to re-cast religious doctrines in the rational moulds.

As is evident, the Muslim philosophy largely concerned itself in its early phase to the solution of mainly theological problems. Muslim philosophy in its second phase led to the development of mysticism or Sufism. Though the seeds of the development of this school were present in Islam itself, it was largely influenced by Neo-Platonism and Indo-Persian philosophy. The prophet of Islam had mystic learnings. He often used to go to cave of Hira for meditation. He was often found in a state of complete absorption in God. Moreover, there were some companions of the prophet who may rightly be called the early Sufis. They led an ascetic and devotional life. Imām Hasan Basri, however, is recognised as the first Muslim mystic. After him, we have another great Sufi, Rābia (776 A.D.). Next, we find Dhul-Nun Misri (d. 859 A.D.) who is regarded as a pillar of Islamic mysticism. Bāyāzid Bistāmi, a contemporary of Dhul Num Misri, was also a great Sufi. He upheld the doctrine of self-negation and absorption in God. This led to the development of Pantheism in Islam. This school emphasised esoterism and neglected external law of Islam (Shariah).

The third phase of the development of Muslim Philosophy is marked by the philosophy proper or systematic philosophy. Under it, we have a galaxy of great eastern philosophers such as Al-Kindi (873 A.D.) Al-Fārābi (339 A.H.), Ibn Sinā (Avicenna) 1027 A.D., Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), Ibn Tofail (1185) Ibn Khaldoon (1332-1406), and others. As remarked earlier, M.M. Sharif has placed Imām Ghazali (b-1059) and Imām Rāzi under the head of the middle—roaders, synthesising both philosophy and mysticism.

The above account of the development of Muslim Philosophy has been mostly sketchy and can at best be termed just an introduction. It is not easy to do full justice to the subject considering the brief nature of the essay in limited pages. However, it is hoped that it will succeed in generating readers' interest for further reading.

## 2

### PRACTICAL ADVAITISM OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Swami Vivekananda has been regarded a great visionary of the renaissance India. The frame of reference of his life and times is the period of India's great renaissance after the centuries of slumber during alien rule which had trampled her self-respect and had extinguished the joy of active and opulent life here in this world. Dogmatism, fatalism, inertia, inaction and poverty are some of the marked features of the Indian life preceding the renaissance of which Swami Vivekananda can rightly be called one of the foremost pioneers. He presented such a lucid exposition of India's philosophy, religion and spirituality and it had such an appeal that it captured the fancy of the educated class. Sri Aurobindo, the Mahayogi of Pondicherry himself is said to have received "his first glimpse of spirituality and of the great message of India" from Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the influence of Swami Vivekananda is diverse. The efforts of Swami Vivekananda at reawakening of India can be termed as the most violent, effective and soul-stirring. It is this aspect of his life and teaching that we want to concentrate upon in this chapter. The title may not so aptly describe its orientation which aims at highlighting the practical implications of his Advaitism, that is, his emphasis on active and opulent florescence of life here in this world.

Acquisition of the knowledge of western sciences and technology, his plan to send a few young men to Japan for their acquaintance

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1. R.R. Diwakar ; Mahayogi, p. 53.



with his active strides in life, his emphasis on the ban on child-marriage, his stress on women's education, their economic independence, their self-defence, removal of social evils, his advocacy of non-vegetarian food to attain strong physique, etc, are all the constituents of his conception of practical life in the world. It goes without saying that all this was in response to the need of the hour to throw away the yoke of the foreign rule and to attain the fruition of India's own mission and destiny in the community of free nations. Amongst Muslims, this need of the hour and man's response to it was so deeply felt and so eloquently conveyed by Sir Mohammad Iqbal<sup>2</sup> that we are often tempted to use his terminology to describe Swami Vivekananda's fiery message of vigorous action to the sleeping masses.

The discipline of comparative study has come to be recognised as a very fascinating and interesting academic exercise. In the pursuit of this discipline, to degrade or elevate any system of thought or a thinker should always be regarded despicable. The only worthwhile end should be to develop a sense of wonder and a sense of appreciation in seeing how the ideas of two different thinkers, deriving their inspiration from two different cultural milieu and, perhaps, poles apart in time and space, resemble with each other with such a striking similarity that we have only to marvel on the sameness of the wine even if it is in two different bottles.

Advaita Vedanta is an intricate system of metaphysical thought which has developed into varied streams. Let us here concern ourselves only with Viśistādvaita which affirms the reality and inseparability of Brahman and the world on the analogy of the body and soul. Thus, body—or if one likes to call it—our vital being, becomes a veritable reality and to have its all-directional development together with the fulfilment of our spiritual being comes to constitute the only legitimate ideal of human life. In the history of Indian philosophy, different thinkers at different times have been exaggerating the development of the soul at the cost of the body and the result has been asceticism and poverty of life. This is obviously not a true view of spirituality. Sri Aurobindo believes that such is a morbid spirituality and it came to dominance in times of decadence. Hence

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2. W.C. Smith ; Modern Islam in India, p. 110.

Swami Vivekananda as well as Sri Aurobindo laid great emphasis on the achievement of an active, rich, vigorous and Strong life. It is this aspect of Swami Vivekananda's teaching that we have termed as 'Practical Advaitism'.

Let it be said once again that Swami Vivekananda firmly believed in the development of both soul and body. He was convinced, true Advaitism can best serve the spiritual needs of our soul. However, so far as the development of body is concerned, he once in a letter appreciated the positive and dynamic role of Islam in practical life, so much so that he went on to say, "I see in my mind's eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible, with Vedanta brain and Islam body."<sup>3</sup> This all is not to say by any stretch of imagination that Indian philosophy and culture lacks the message of dynamic life or Islam has nothing spiritual in it. This is just a manner of speech by great minds when they have to emphasis one thing over the other in response to the need of the hour.

The first thing we see in this connection is Swami Vivekananda's heart-felt anguish at the poverty, famine hunger and starvation here in India in those days. The removal of these maladies was the first pre-condition of any religious or cultural rejuvenation. It was the realisation of this fact that he had to lash at the Christian missionaries here in India. Thus, he very sarcastically remarked in the world Parliament of Religions at Chicago "It is an insult to a starving people to offer them religion; it is an insult to a starving man to teach him metaphysics."<sup>4</sup> The essence of Karmayoga, for him, consisted in selflessness and service to others. He felt the need of such a yoga so intensely that he went so far as asserting that a Karmayogi need not have faith in God or soul or may not think of any metaphysical speculation.<sup>5</sup> Buddha was an embodiment of the ideal of Karma-yoga in the opinion of Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Iqbal and all of them had a great veneration for him on the count that he continued to serve humanity even after attaining Nirvana.

3. Selections from Swami Vivekananda, Calcutta, 1963, pp. 593-94.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

The next point for us to see is Swami Vivekananda's emphasis on man's quest for his conquest of nature. Thus, in a lecture in London he remarked, "We are not born as helpers of nature. . . . We are its bond—masters. . . . Nature says, go and live in the forest. Man says, I will build a house and fight with nature, and he does so. The whole history of humanity is a continuous fight against the so called laws of nature, and man gains in the end."<sup>6</sup> Where can we get a better glorification of the powers of man who, even after being placed in a uncongenial environment, has succeeded in creating a better world for himself.

Swami Vivekananda regarded weakness a sin : "Know that all sins and all evils can be summed up in that one word, weakness. It is weakness that is the motive power in all evil doing, it is weakness that is the source of all selfishness, it is weakness, that makes men injure others."<sup>7</sup> At another place, he remarks "The best guide in life is strength. In religion as in all other matters, discard everything that weakens you; have nothing to do with it."<sup>8</sup>

In the same veins, we can see Swami Vivekananda's exhortation for the need of a fiery action. At one place, he says, "What our country wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and secrets of the universe, and will accomplish their purpose in any fashion, even if it means going down to the bottom of the ocean and meeting death face to face. This is what we want, and that can only be created, established and strengthened by understanding and realising the ideal of the Advaita, that ideal on oneness of all."<sup>9</sup>

According to Swami Vivekananda, the beginning of any great endeavour, whether spiritual or mundane depends on one's faith in his own self. Thus, he remarks, "The secret of Advaita is : Believe in yourselves first, and then believe in anything else. In the history of the world, we will find that only those nations that have believed in themselves have become great and strong. In the history of each

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-47.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 281, Iqbal goes a step further and regards it a crime :

8. Quoted from T.M.P. Mahadevan and C.V. Saroja : *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, New Delhi, 1983, pp. 18-19.

9. *Selections from Swami Vivekananda*, p. 282.



nation, you will always find that only those individuals who have believed in themselves have become great and strong."<sup>10</sup>

There are many passages in Swami Vivekananda's writings where he exhorts us to rise and awake and to adopt a philosophy of active and vigorous life. Thus, he says: "Arise and awake and be perfectly sincere. Our insincerity in India is awful; What we want is character, that steadiness and character that make a man cling on to a thing like grim death."<sup>11</sup> Swami Vivekananda was pained at heart to see Indian people weak and devoid of joy of living an active and vigorous life. Thus, he remarks: "What a look of sadness on their faces and want of courage and enthusiasm in their hearts, with large stomachs and no strength in their hands and feet—a set of cowards frightened at every trifle."<sup>12</sup> It was in pursuit of this ideal of active life, that Swami Vivekananda justified fish and meat eating for Indians.

Again, it was in the pursuit of this ideal that Swami Vivekananda formulated a plan of education which should be a fine synthesis of Indian wisdom with English language and western sciences and technology—the seed of economic regeneration lies in such an educational policy and it was at this point that he had a plan of sending some young men to Japan to acquire knowledge to help rebuild a strong India.<sup>13</sup> Similarly his emphasis on women's education, acquisition of the spirit of valour and heroism, their economic independence were all the part of his plan on education.

As we have said in the beginning, it is in context with the priority and the need of the hour that Swami Vivekananda regards struggle and acquiring power and strength as the only hope for India's resurgence. Otherwise, he is in favour of a perfect and harmonious development of all the faculties of man—physical, mental and spiritual—best described by Sri Aurobindo's term, integral education. Thus, at one place, Swami Vivekananda has remarked, "The true man

10. Selections from Swami Vivekananda, p. 282.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 446.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 480 and 484,

is he who is strong as strength itself and yet possesses a woman's heart."<sup>14</sup>

In this way, we find that Swami Vivekananda was not so much interested in the theoretical intricacies of Vedantic interpretations as in the practical implications of it. He was enthused with a strong desire to see India reawaken to its past glory which for him consisted in a synthesis of spirituality and all-directional development of life here in this world. A resurgent, free and strong India was the India of his dreams. Thus, there is every justification in regarding him a foremost pioneer of renaissance in India.

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14. *Ibid.*, p. 340, A Persian couplet describes this truth beautifully :  
In love, we are a bunch of flowers that trembles with the morning breeze.  
In the works of life, we possess the attributes of granite.

# 3

## THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING IN IQBAL'S • PHILOSOPHY

The problem of suffering has also been referred to as the problem of evil in the history of human thought. Ever since man began to reflect over God, soul and universe, this problem has agitated the minds of both the philosopher and the religious man alike. Some thinkers have reckoned the fact of positive presence of suffering in the universe. Others have tended to regard it as simply superficial, all the world being the pulsation of one divine delight. Still others have regarded this world and all it contains as unreal and illusory. Similarly, the solutions which have been suggested are also varied. Some thinkers stand for the struggle with the evil forces and believe in man's capacity to conquer these forces in the long run. These thinkers may be termed as meliorists or pragmatists. Others think that a right knowledge about God, man and universe will solve this problem automatically. They may be termed as optimists. Still other seek the solution of the problem in the cessation of desires and the escape from the world. They may be termed as pessimists.

All the great religions of the world have got their own characteristic way of dealing with this problem of suffering. In this chapter, we wish to present the Islamic point of view, particularly as represented by Muhammad Iqbāl.

At the very outset, let us see the meaning which the word 'suffering' carries with it. It includes two types of suffering :

- (a) Physical suffering, such as storms, earthquakes, floods, droughts, famines, diseases and death;



- (b) Suffering born of man's own conduct, such as mental suffering, frustration, pangs of repentance, the sense of failure and the sufferings born of wars, strifes and discords.

Next we have to see how the problem poses itself before man. The religious man who possesses a philosophical temperament, or a philosopher who possesses a religious bent of mind, naturally finds the goodness and perfection of God as conflicting with the presence of evil in the world. He asks: Is the evil something alien and external to God? If so, being omnipotent, why does He not root out the evil which is just opposed to His essence and thus save man from much suffering? Or else, is He Himself the creator of the evil? If so, what can be the purpose of God in its creation?

Let us now proceed to understand the problem in the framework of Islam. According to Islam, the world and all it contains is real and possesses positive existence. And so is the case with the presence of suffering in this world. Iqbāl finds the fact of moral and physical evil standing out prominently in the life of Nature and he sees something terribly positive about it.

Now, at this stage, two points figure out very prominently. First, according to the *Qur'an*, the world is not a cursed place where the elementally wicked humanity is imprisoned. On the contrary, the *Qur'an* regards the earth to be the 'dwelling place' of man and a 'source of profit' to him for the possession of which he ought to be grateful to God. Thus the *Qur'an* says:

And we have established you on the earth and given therein support of life. How little do ye give thanks ?<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, whatever evil and suffering we find in the world is not the result of the original sin of Adam which may be infecting all the generations of man, past, present and future. The *Qur'an* is very clear on this point. It repeatedly emphasizes that every man will be held responsible for only that which he himself has done, and no man will share the burden of the sins of others.

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1. *Qur'an* 7 ; 9,

Man is in the real world, and there exists suffering actually in the world he lives in. Now the problem is how to explain this presence of suffering. Here it may be interesting to note Iqbāl's interpretation of the legend of the fall of man referred to in the Old Testament as well as the *Qur'an*. For, he thinks, it will give some clue to the understanding of the problem of suffering. Iqbāl has maintained that the legend of the fall of Adam from the paradise mentioned in the *Qur'an* has not been used to describe the first appearance of man on the surface of the earth. According to him, its "purpose is rather to indicate man's rise from a primitive state of instinctive appetite to the conscious possession of free self, capable of doubt and disobedience."<sup>2</sup> Thus, Adam's first disobedience of God marks the conscious realization of the possession of freedom of will to choose good or evil. Free personality is, according to the *Qur'an*, God's trust with man. Now it is upto him to use this trust rightly or wrongly. The *Qur'an* makes its position clear regarding good and evil. It says :

And for trial will we test you with evil and with good.<sup>3</sup>

Dealing with the legend in question, Iqbāl further remarks that the word 'Adam' has not been used to describe a particular concrete individual but the whole human race. His view is that it is highly probable that this legend "arose out of the primitive man's desire to explain to himself the infinite misery of his plight in an uncongenial environment, which abounded in disease and death and obstructed him on all sides in his endeavour to maintain himself."<sup>4</sup>

According to Iqbāl, the *Qur'an* has split the episode of the fall of Adam into two. The first episode relates simply to the 'tree' and the other relates to the 'tree of eternity' and the 'Kingdom that faileth not.' The first episode is mentioned in the 7th and the second in the 20th *sura* of the *Qur'an*. Interpreting the first episode, Iqbāl, quoting the testimony of H. P. Blavatski, author of *The Secret Doctrine*, says :

2. Iqbāl, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, p. 85.

3. *Qur'an*, 21 : 35.

4. Iqbāl, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

With the ancients the tree was a cryptic symbol for occult knowledge. Adam was forbidden to taste the fruit of this tree obviously because his finitude as a self, his sense equipment and his intellectual faculties, were, on the whole, attuned to a different type of knowledge, the type of knowledge which necessitates the toil of patient observation and admits only of slow accumulation.<sup>5</sup>

On the advice of Satan, Adam sought a short cut to knowledge by tasting the fruit. Iqbāl thinks, therefore, that the only way to correct this tendency was to place him in an environment which, however painful, was better suited to the unfolding of his intellectual faculties. Consequently, Adam was sent to the painful physical environment so that man may have the joy of perpetual growth and expansion through enlarging the possibilities of his knowledge which enriches by the method of trial and error.

According to Iqbāl, the purpose of the second episode is to describe man's desire to attain immortality through sexual reproduction. It is if life says to death : "If you sweep away one generation of living things, I will produce another." However, due to the emergence of multitudinous individualities, there issues forth an awful struggle for existence. Hence Iqbāl holds the view that this "mutual conflict of opposing individualities is the world pain which both illuminates and darkens the temporal career of life."<sup>6</sup> The sufferings and other evils are, according to him, the necessary accompaniment of the finitude of our 'self'. Iqbāl says that the *Qur'an* regards true manhood as consisting in 'patience under ills and hardships'.

It has now become clear that there is the positive existence of suffering in the world. As to the reason of its presence, Iqbāl says that at the present stage of human evolution, we cannot fully understand the purpose of the presence of suffering. However, he thinks that there can be no meaning behind it except that the driving power of suffering provides man with a discipline so that his self may become hardened and fortified against a possible dissolution. Iqbāl's conclusion is this :

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5. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

We cannot understand the full import of the great cosmic forces which work havoc, and at the same time sustain and amplify life. The teaching of the *Qur'an*, which believes in the possibility of improvement in the behaviour of man and his control over natural forces, is neither optimism, nor pessimism. It is meliorism, which recognizes a growing universe and is animated by the hope of man's eventual victory over evil.<sup>7</sup>

The above idea finds ample expression throughout Iqbāl's poetry. He defines life in his poems as a continuous restlessness, constant burning, ceaseless quest and a wish to advance on the journey without longing for destination. For him, Satan represents the presence of sufferings in the world. Satan stimulates activity and thus promotes the abundance of life. Iqbāl maintains that when life is hedged in with sufferings and difficulties, it struggles to survive and thus becomes strong and fortified. Hence in his poetry Iqbāl has not condemned Satan for the evils and sufferings which he brings in the universe. For, in his absence, there would be no opposing forces which put obstacles in the way of life. Iqbāl welcomes all the difficulties, dangers, sufferings and grief. Thus, in his poem *Taskhir-e Fitarat*, Satan admonishes Adam :

*Thou doth not know yet that the love dies having achieved the union.*

*What is life everlasting ?*

*It is ceaseless burning.*<sup>8</sup>

Elsewhere, Iqbāl has said :

*If you want to live, live in dangers.*<sup>9</sup>

Iqbāl thinks that as there was no work to do in the heavens, the life of Adam was very monotonous. Satan, the symbol of active life, brought him down on the earth full of pain and suffering. Once having come in this unfavourable environment, man has got the mission of conquering the evil forces and mastering the Nature to remould it nearer to his heart's desires. However, Iqbāl's Satan

7. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

8. *Payam-e mashriq*, p. 99.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 143.



finds that man is very weak and frail and does too readily surrender himself to his crafts. Hence in *Jāwed nāmāh*, he complains to God that he is spoiled due to this weak-spirited man. He says :

*O God : Give me a strong worshipper of the Truth (i.e., God),  
So that I may enjoy the pleasure of defeat.<sup>10</sup>*

Thus, we can see that Iqbāl holds the view that the evolution of life cannot be complete without its struggle with the forces which negate and oppose it. These negative forces are necessary and vital. They are to be conquered and mastered. The struggle with the evil forces will make the self-strong and fortified and thus save it from dissolution at the time of death.

In the end, let us see Iqbāl's glorification of man who turned the adverse circumstances to his advantage. In the following verses Iqbāl makes man address God thus :

*Thou created darkness, I created lamp.  
Thou created earth, I created goblet.  
Thou created wilderness, mountains and forests.  
I created gardens, parks and greeneries.  
I am one who makes mirror out of stone,  
I am one who draw honey out of poison.<sup>11</sup>*

It is essential for man, therefore, according to Iqbāl, to adopt the melioristic or pragmatic attitude towards the problem of suffering, otherwise he cannot adjust himself in a world where evil forces threaten man's life. Man ought to have before him the ideal of controlling the forces of Nature and utilize them for the welfare of the humanity.

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10. *Jāwed nāmāh*, pp. 160-61.

11. *Payam-e- mashriq*, p. 132.

## 4

### RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S CONCEPT OF CREATIVE LIFE

The main frame of reference here is provided by Rabindranath Tagore's essay, 'The Teacher' in his celebrated book, *The Religion of Man*. In this essay, he tells us how he felt a great urge to come out of his exile in a dream-world of literature into the fullness of truth which, for him, consisted in a 'spiritual self-realization in the Life of Man through some disinterested service of the humanity. Also, this essay tells us how Tagore felt compelled to come out of the seclusion of his literary career and take his part in the world of practical activities. This was the occasion when the solitary enjoyment of the infinite in meditations no longer satisfied him and he founded a school for the children in Bengal.

Again, it was on this occasion that we find Rabindranath Tagore explaining the aim of education. He says, "In such a place education necessarily becomes the preparation for a complete life of man which can only become possible by living that life through knowledge and service, enjoyment and creative work."<sup>1</sup> And this aim of education is precisely what forms Tagore's concept of creative life. As we proceed on to examine various facets of this conception of life, we may find that creativity is not to be taken in a narrow sense of art which is but a reflection of life. It should be rather taken in its wider meaning to include each and every sphere of our practical life—art, literature, knowledge, enjoyment action and the creation of life itself.<sup>2</sup>

1. *The Religion of Man*, p. 102.

2. Abu Sayeed Ayyub : *Tagore's Quest*, (Calcutta, 1980), p. 86.

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Let it be said that Tagore's ideal is this creative life rather than some kind of deliverance or emancipation. If at all the emancipation is the goal, the ideal, it is not to be sought, according to Tagore, in some heaven beyond, for being cut off from our life's earthly footings is just another name for death. Tagore conveys this truth to us metaphorically : Emancipation from the bondage of the soil is no freedom for the tree."<sup>3</sup> Else where also, he makes it clear to us that he cannot find deliverance in renunciation. On the contrary, he feels "the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight."<sup>4</sup> In Gitanjali's poem No 43, he tells us emphatically that he shall never turn ascetic.

As a matter of fact, asceticism defeats the very purpose of life. What God wants from us is to embrace this world which is an immanent form of the infinite. God's displeasure, rather anguish, is to be seen when at midnight, Siddharta renounced his wife, his son and his home :

"God commanded, 'Stop, fool, leave not thy home,' but still heard not."

God sighed and complained, 'Why does my servant wander to seek me, forsaking me ?'<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that according to Tagore, the deliverance is not to be found in renunciation of creative life. He rightly remarks : "Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of cration," and Tagore gives us a clarion call to come out of our meditations and "stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the adoption of a life of creativity in art, knowledge and action is also the self-realization for man. According to Rabindranath Tagore, the imperfect and unfinished nature of the universe is the field and condition of such a creative life. He accepts the fact of the positive existence of suffering and evil, both physical and moral. It is this problem of evil which is the bane of all theism and Tagore was

3. Rabindranath Tagore : Fireflies, p. 243.

4. Rabindranath Tagore : Gitanjali, Poem No. 73.

5. *Ibid.*, Poem No. 75.

6. Gitanjali, Poem No. 11.

deeply touched by its obnoxious nature. He writes : "Must I think of Thee apart from suffering, danger, dread and death ? No. . .with trembling heart and tearful eyes, I will not fool myself by conceiving Thee as merciful."

Fortunately, the problem of evil did not lead Tagore to atheism. Rather his solution of the problem is unique in the sense that his God himself is in need of man's co-operation and help to overcome and conquer the forces of evil and suffering which threaten life at every step. Thus, man is, to Tagore, only a partner, comrade and co-worker with God. In *Gitanjali*, man has been depicted as saying to God,

"You have made me alms-giving  
And turned beggar yourself—"<sup>7</sup>

Elsewhere. Tagore remarks :

'I know not why thou choolest me for thy partner, Lord of my Life."<sup>8</sup>

The point is further corroborated when he says,

'My faith in truth, my vision of the perfect,  
help thee, Master, in thy creation."<sup>9</sup>

Placed in such an unharmonious universe, man's only mission is to struggle and conquer the evil forces and to make this world a fit place to live in by establishing the kingdom of heaven here upon earth. Thus, Tagore writes : "In the Old Testament it is said that man once dwelled in a paradise where there was no sorrow, no death. But that heaven which I have not conquered through suffering, fighting against evil, is not a true heaven."<sup>10</sup>

The ennobling aspect of human life is that man has to strive to bring about order, harmony, peace, progress and solace to the

7. *Ibid.*, Poem No. 33.

8. *The Religion of Man*, p. 60.

9. *Tagore : Firflies*, p. 224.

10. *Tagore : A Flight of Swans* (Tr. by Aurobindo Bose) London, 1962, p. 70.



world out of chaotic, uncharitable and hence uncongenial environment. Imperfection is the condition, promise and field for the manifestation of the creativity in man. That is why Tagore remarks, "Perhaps the Crescent moon smiles in doubt at being told that it is a fragment awaiting perfection."<sup>11</sup> And again, "Light accepts darkness for his spouse for the sake of creation."<sup>12</sup> It is in this background that Tagore regards Man as the highest truth of the universe. As there is nothing in the paradise to be done, the gods become tired of it and they envy man.<sup>13</sup>

Rabindranath Tagore exhorts us to keep our firm faith in the 'Life that creates and not in the Machine that constructs'—He accepts science and industrialization to the extent they help destroy evil and enrich the human life, 'but not when the two enter into unholy alliance'<sup>14</sup> against man. It is the pursuit of this ideal of active and vigorous life that the 'solitary enjoyment of the infinite in meditation no longer satisfied.'<sup>15</sup> Tagore and he came out to embrace the activities of life. His exhortation to an ascetic longing is worth-seeing :

"Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut ? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee :

He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil."<sup>16</sup>

Evidently, Tagore had an abiding faith in the divinity of the common man. He did not accept the proposition that man is essentially sinful.<sup>17</sup> The fact being so, the service to humanity is the worship of God, a way to self-realization. Tagore remarks,

11. *Fireflies*, p. 179.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

14. *The Religion of Man*, p. 101.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

16. *Gitanjali*, Poem No. 11.

17. V. Lensy : *Rabindranath Tagore, His Personality and Work*, p. 176.

'I will worship you with labour.'<sup>18</sup> And again, And our, true worship lies in our indomitable courage to be great and thus to represent the human divine and ever to keep open the path of freedom towards the unattained."<sup>19</sup>

Desires and aspiration have an important role in the creative life of man since it is they that set before us ideals which again act as motive-force for their actualization in life. A life devoid of desires is no better than death. That is why Tagore says :

"Light, oh where is the light ? Kindle it with the burning fire of desires. There is the lamp but never a flicker of a flame—is such thy fate, my heart ! Ah, death were better by far for thee"<sup>20</sup>

In the same poem, he explains the significance of the misery and pain. It is because of them that man becomes wakeful and active through his struggle with them. Tagore says :

"Misery knocks at thy door, and her message is that thy lord is wakeful, and he calls thee to the love-tryst through the darkness of night."

In emphasizing the importance of striving and struggle in the creative life of man, and in condemning inaction, passivity and languor, Tagore goes to the extent of accepting rebellion even against God, for, rebellion is a sign of active and hence creative life of man. The following verses from him are worth-seeing :

"God honoured me with his fight  
When I was rebellious,  
He ignored me when I was languid."<sup>21</sup>

No wonder, there should be obstacles and sufferings in life. However, the revolution of the giant wheel of pain can be checked

18. Gitanjali, Poem No. 73.

19. The Religion of Man, p. 76.

20. Gitanjali, Poem No. 27.

21. Fireflies, p. 208.

by man by dint of his indomitable will and courage. Again, in emphasizing the significance of struggle and striving to conquer the force of evil, Tagore goes to the other extreme of regarding them an end in itself—not a means to some end. He sings :

“These paper boats of mine are meant to dance  
on the ripple of hours, and not to reach any destination.”<sup>22</sup>

However, this is just a poetic way of putting things. Otherwise man's final victory over the evil forces is bound to come if we adopt a life of creativity in face of all the obstacles and difficulties. The destination is well before us. What is needed is our valiant fight with courage and determination. The following lines cannot be without inspiring us :

“Only this the sailors know,  
That living or dying,  
Battling with the waves,  
With sails full spread and helm held firm,  
They must hold on for the new shore  
With your mind intent, cross this sea of chaos  
And sail to that shore of new creation”<sup>23</sup>

In this way, we find that Rabindranath Tagore firmly believed in a creative life which is manifested not only in all forms of art but also in creating and changing life in the world through man's struggle with the forces which threaten to negate life. He took a positive view of suffering and evil where man's creativity is needed to conquer them and to make life comfortable and delightful. From this point of view, even art becomes purposive and subservient to life. Tagore's poetic way of criticizing the passivity and languor is so inspiring that it drives man to embrace a life of strife with the evils. The following lines from *Gitanjali* are worth-quoting :

“Languor is upon your heart and the slumber is still on your eyes.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

23. Rabindranath Tagore : *A Flight of Swans* (Trans. by Aurobindo Bose) London, 1962, pp. 93-95.

Has not the word come to you that the flower is reigning in splendour among thorns ? Wake, oh awaken ! Let not the time pass in vain !

What if the sky pants and trembles with the heat of the midday sun—what if the burning sand spreads its mantle of thirst—

Is there no joy in the deep of your heart ? At every footfall of yours, will not the harp of the road break out in sweet music of pain. ?”<sup>24</sup>

Thus, we find that the pain and suffering have a value for a creative life. Tagore has written so much about death. But death too seems to have a meaning as it is, according to Tagore, a little of much needed wastefulness for the creative activity of God. Thus he says :

“Pearl shells cast up by the sea on death’s barren beach—  
a magnificent wastefulness of creative life.”<sup>25</sup>

However, the problem of suffering and evil is an intricate one, It is difficult to understand why it is there at all. Its dimensions and variety are like thorns in human heart and their operations are often sickening and maddening. Even then only sane approach is to fight with the evil forces and conquer them. Our passive surrender will be of no help. At any rate, they provide field, condition and promise for the manifestation of human creativity.

24. Gitanjali, Poem No. 55.

25. Fireflies, p. 247.



# 5

## IQBAL'S WELTANSCHAUUNG

As we know, the main springs of Indian Philosophy are the Vedas and the Upanishads. Similarly, the main source of Muslim thought lies in the Qur'an. These scriptures, by virtue of their very nature admit the possibility of varied interpretations. And at times, their statements seem conflicting. That is why we have many schools of thought both in Indian and Muslim Philosophy which are directly or indirectly based on these scriptures.

Dr. Iqbal (1878-1938) was confronted with what he considered to be a major misinterpretation of the Qur'an. He thinks that a certain class of mystics misinterpreted the Qur'anic metaphor of light used for describing God. They failed to see the oneness of God as a person or individual. Their logic of thought led them to a pantheistic conception of God as an all-pervasive cosmic element, *i.e.*, light. Iqbal found out that it is true that some Qur'anic verses define God as 'light' but those verses have not been read in full context. The full text of the verses in question runs as follows :

"God is the light of the Heaven and of the Earth. His light is like a niche in which is a lamp. . . the lamp encased in a glass, . . . the glass, as it were, a star." (24 : 35)

Interpreting the above verses of the Qur'an, Iqbal says that it is true that the opening line of the verse seems to afford an escape from an individualistic conception of God. But when we proceed further, we see that the conception of God as a formless all pervasive cosmic element is negated first by centralizing the light in a flame and then through individualising the flame by its encasement in a glass likened

into a well-defined star.”<sup>1</sup> Iqbal’s personal view is that description of God as light in the revealed literature of the world is meant to suggest God’s absoluteness and not His omnipresence. To describe God’s absoluteness, the light is the nearest approach, for, “the velocity of light cannot be exceeded and is the same for all observers whatever their own system of movement.”<sup>2</sup> Iqbal rejects the metaphor of light as being used to describe God’s omnipresence because it destroys the possibility of a personal God and thus leads to pantheistic interpretation.

It may be pointed out here that Iqbal is not opposed to pantheism as such. To him pantheism is only a half-truth. Immanence and transcendence are complementary to each other; they are not contradictory categories for understanding the ultimate Reality. Iqbal holds that in the creative energy of the Ultimate Self, the deed and thought are identical. Hence the process of creation is best described by the term, self-manifestation or self-revelation. Moreover, the universe is not a “confronting other” (i.e., external) to God.

In the case of the two early schools of thought in Islam—Mu‘tazilism and Ash‘arism—the question of God’s wisdom and justice on the one hand, and omnipotence, on the other, had been a cause of great controversy. Iqbal solves this problem with great ease. He holds that the divine omnipotence in the sense of absence of limitation is an abstract term which if taken literally may mean merely “a blind and capricious power without limits.” Hence, Iqbal is led to think that the limitations are necessary for all activity whether creational or otherwise. That is why the Qur’an, according to Iqbal, regards the Divine Omnipotence as intimately related to the Divine Wisdom. No doubt, God is Omnipotent, but He, by virtue of His Wisdom, does not act arbitrarily but in a recurrent and regular way. The consciousness is considered as constituting the basic essence of the ultimate Reality. Thought or consciousness is not external to a thing but a “potency which is formative of the very being of its material.”<sup>3</sup> He further says that it is the ultimate ground

1. Iqbal : The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, p. 64.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

of things and constitutes the very essence of their being. Constituting thus the very inner self of a thing, it has engendered an urge for self-realization in that thing.

The ultimate Reality is manifesting itself in the multitudinous forms of the world. These forms are nothing but varied space-time relationships of Matter. And this matter is nothing but supreme Spirit in disguised form. That is why, Iqbal says that matter is spirit itself in "space-time reference" and "space and time are interpretations which thought puts upon the creative activity of the ultimate Ego."<sup>4</sup>

Time and space are only the intellectualisation of the ultimate Reality essential for effective action in the world. Iqbal says that God's infinity is not spatial and temporal. The true meaning of the infinity of God is "the infinite inner possibilities of His creative activity."<sup>5</sup> He further tells as that the physical universe is only a partial expression of that creativity. Time cannot also be regarded as fourth dimension. For, it will imply that future is already given as 'indubitably fixed as the past' and it will leave freedom neither for God nor for man. Thus, Time is only a free creative movement. Further more, the emergence of movement from the infinite Reality is not a historical time process to which a date could be given. Hence this emergence of movement is a single indivisible eternal 'now'.<sup>6</sup>

Only durational time, not serial time, is applicable to God because His Time "does not admit of divisibility, sequence and change. It is above eternity; it has neither beginning nor end."<sup>7</sup> Here Iqbal criticises Asharite thinkers for regarding Time as a succession of individual "nows" for, according to his point of view, there would always be a gap, a void of time between every two individual 'nows' of time and thus the continuity of time will be broken.<sup>8</sup> In Qur'an, we read, "God created all things and assigned to each its destiny." Interpreting this verse of Qur'an, Iqbal clarifies

4. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

the identification of Time with Destiny. He says that a destiny of a thing is not an "unrelenting fate working from without like a task master." It is not something externally and compulsorily imposed. The true meaning of destiny is the realisable inner possibilities of that thing which would actualise themselves freely in future.<sup>9</sup>

Next, we can see the identification of the time and the ultimate Reality. According to Iqbal, Time is an essential element in the life of the Reality. If the change as Duration is not applicable to God, He becomes inert and passive, "a stagnant neutrality, an absolute nothing." To make it more clear, he says that we cannot conceive motion without Time and Time is experienced by a psychic life (self). Hence self is more fundamental than motion "No psychic life, no time; no time, no motion." Iqbal thinks, this is the reason that the Qur'an regards the alternation of day and night as the greatest sign of God.

The Reality, in itself being infinite and ineffable, chooses to wear the garbs of space and time so as to express itself into visible "becoming" to realise and measure," as Iqbal puts it, "the infinite wealth of his own undetermined creative possibilities,"<sup>10</sup> yet He is beyond these finite modes of space and time. The realisation of this truth comes to us only if we exercise our intuition which is possible only in a higher consciousness, *i.e.*, "appreciative self," Iqbal says, "on the one hand, therefore, the ego lives in eternity, by which term I mean non-successional change, on the other, it lives in serial time."<sup>11</sup>

Certain pantheists and mystics have regarded the human individuality or the finite centre for the working of the ultimate Reality as illusory and unreal. Consequently, they have advocated the ideal of self-negation and absorption in the supreme Self. Iqbal's philosophy is a revolt against all such philosophies. Such philosophies have resulted in asceticism, poverty of life, inaction, passivity and fatalism. Iqbal is pained to see this and he wages a war to remove this misinterpretation in his philosophical tradition. The

9. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 78.



Buddhistic, Neo-Platonic and Persian influences gave exaggerated emphasis to the philosophy of self-negation. We can see how Iqbal feels about this problem. He writes: "The moral and religious ideal of man is not self-negation but self-affirmation, and he attains to this ideal by becoming more and more individual, more and more unique. The Prophet said "Takhallaqu bi-Akhlaq allah," 'Create in yourself the attributes of God.' Thus, man becomes unique by becoming more and more like the most unique individual, *i.e.*, God.<sup>12</sup>

The crux of Iqbal's approach is to affirm the reality of the individuality of man. He regards our 'self' as a luminous point or centre of our being. It "is the life-spark beneath our dust."<sup>13</sup> In a verse of Armughān-e-Hijāz, he says, "The existence of the human self is due to the existence of God. The manifestation of the human self is due to the manifestation of God. I don't know where this shining pearl (*i.e.*, self) would have been if there were no river (*i.e.*, God).<sup>14</sup>

We come to the end of this chapter with a discussion of Iqbal's view on the theory of evolution. He agrees that the process of self-manifestation of the ultimate Reality has been evolutionary in nature. The evolution is not a result of merely blind physico-chemical forces. In fact, his concept of evolution is that of spiritual evolution. Consciousness cannot be regarded merely an epiphenomenon of Matter. Secondly, his concept of evolution pre-supposes the fact of prior involution. Thirdly, he is not prepared to accept merely the struggle for existence or the adaptation to the environment as the sole motive force behind evolution. The urge to attain ever greater delight of existence, ever greater power and knowledge, to attain higher and higher consciousness is the main propelling force behind evolution. Fourthly, the evolutionary process cannot stop at any particular stage. *e.g.*, man. Thus, present man is only a transitional being, not the final product of the evolution. Man has to transcend his present limitations and incapacities both mental and physical and

12. Iqbal's introduction to R.A. Nicholson's English translation of his (Iqbal's) *Asrar-e-Khudi* (Persian): *The Secrets of the Self*, pp. XVII-XIX.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

14. Iqbal: *Armughān-e-Hijāz* (In Persian).

is destined to be superman who will make the kingdom of heaven upon earth possible.

Iqbal is opposed to the mechanistic interpretation of life. He says that life is self-maintaining and self-reproducing while a machine is not so. He brings another argument to show that mechanical evolution is not tenable. He says that the whole of the universe is in a state of creative flow—new forms of life and consciousness emerging constantly. This creative activity is a matter of free choice and is opposed to repetition while the mechanical action is always repetitive.

Iqbal thinks that the Qur'anic description of God as the First and the Last, visible and invisible also supports the point in question. At another place, Iqbal says still more specifically that matter is spirit in space time reference.<sup>15</sup> Again, he defines Matter as a "colony of egos of a low order out of which emerges the ego of a higher order when their association and interaction reach a certain degree of co-ordination."<sup>16</sup>

According to Iqbal, the legend of the fall of Adam in the Qur'an is not to explain the first emergence of man on earth. He thinks that legend is to explain the presence of evil and suffering in this world. He quotes the Qur'an which says, "we have caused you to grow from the earth." This means that man is not a stranger to this earth. The second implication of the legend, according to him, consists in describing man's state of rising from a primitive and instinctive state to the state of possessing a free personality capable of doubt and disobedience. Yet another implication of the legend of Adam tasting the fruit of the forbidden tree is to represent man's urge for immortality which is, according to Iqbal, possible only through reproduction.<sup>17</sup>

In his book, "The Reconstruction", Iqbal gives the views of Jāhiz (d. 255 A.H.), Ibn-Maskawaih (d. 421 A.H.) and Jalāluddin Rūmi (d. 672 A.H.) regarding evolution. Jāhiz has shown how the

15. The Reconstruction, p. 154.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 85-88.

changes in animal life occur due to migration and environmental effects. Iqbal regards Ibn Maskawaih's theory of evolution as in full conformity with the modern theory of the origin of man. He regards date-palm tree as a connecting link between plants and animals. Similarly he holds horse among animals and the falcon among birds as the highest creation of evolution and, lastly, he regards the ape as the connecting link between animal and man. Jalāluddin Rūmi also believes in a biological evolution which closely resembles with Darwin's. On the basis of his theory, Rūmi considers immortality of man as a matter of biological evolution; man's life career cannot come to an end on death. Moreover, the present man and his mental equipment is not the last word in evolution. But the mechanical evolution ends up in pessimism.

However, Rūmi's conception of evolution furnishes us with an optimistic note and kindles in man the fire of enthusiasm for life. A significant feature of Rūmi's theory of Evolution is that the guiding force and chief operative principle over this process of evolution throughout has been God. At every stage, the divine principle has intervened and redeemed the higher out of the lower stage. Thus, he says : "Again, the great creator, as you know, drew man out of the animal into the human state."<sup>18</sup> Evidently, according to Iqbal, God has been a presiding principle in the process of evolution; it is not a blind mechanical process.

We have thus outlined Iqbal's weltanschauung. When we analyse his thought, we find that he was convinced of the truth of Islam and was eager to demonstrate that the Islamic teachings are in conformity with the findings of the modern sciences. The Muslims had always an empirical and positivistic view of the world. The Qur'an lays emphasis on the observation and the reflective thinking. This made Muslims the forerunners of all sciences. Iqbal was enamoured of all this and applied various concepts of physical and biological sciences in explication of various metaphysical concepts in Islamic philosophy. And this is what we have been emphasising in the foregoing pages.

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18, *Ibid.*, p. 122.

## 6

### IQBAL'S VIEW OF RENOVATION IN ISLAM

The question of change *vis-a-vis* religion is of vital importance. This question is specially relevant to Islam in view of the fact that it is more or less the latest religion available in written form and it claims to be a universal religion. Not only this, the belief that there would be no prophet after prophet Mohammad is very fundamental to Islam. The two main sources of Islamic law are the Qur'an and the Traditions of the holy prophet. These two sources provide well-defined guidance in all matters of human life whether spiritual or mundane. There are yet two more sources of Islamic law which have equally been regarded as valid. These are Ijmā and Qiyas, meaning consensus of the learned scholars of Islam and analogy respectively.

It is very natural and vital that Islam must have a definite principle of change if it has to be a guidance for all the future generations. That there actually is such a principle of change in Islam has amply been illustrated by Iqbal in his article entitled as "The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam" in his 'Reconstruction'. One explicit aim of Iqbal in writing his book 'Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam' (as the title itself suggests) is to show that the teachings of the Qur'an can be reinterpreted in the light of the growth of modern sciences and that Islamic Law fully admits the possibility of change in view of new requirements of a changing and growing universe which is still in the process of making and is not a finished product.

Iqbal takes great pains to show that in order to cope with such a growing universe, Islam has got a definite principle of change, that is, 'Ijtihād' meaning 'exerting with a view to form an independent

judgement on a legal question. In his support, he quotes the Qur'an which says,

“And to those who exert,  
We show our path,”

He further strengthens this principle of change by quoting a tradition of the Holy Prophet. “When Maad was appointed ruler of Yemen, the prophet is reported to have asked him as to how he would decide matters coming up before him. ‘I will judge matters according to the Book of God,’ said Maad. ‘But ‘if the Book of God contains nothing to guide you ?’ ‘Then I will act on the precedents of the prophet of God; ‘But if the precedents fail ?’ ‘Then I will exert to form my own judgement.’ At this, the prophet is said to have complimented him and approved his ideas.

It is on the basis of the above quoted tradition of the prophet and also on the basis of the two sources of Islamic law, viz., consensus of the learned scholars and analogous reasoning that Ijtihād has been recognized as a valid principle of change in the structure of Islam. Now Iqbal seeks to convey to us that this principle in the sense of complete authority in legislation has been admitted by the Muslims only as a theoretical possibility but in practice it has always been denied ever since the establishment of the Islamic schools of law in as much as the idea of complete Ijtihād is hedged round by conditions which are impossible of realization in a single individual. How painfully Iqbal feels about this situation is evident by the following lines from him : “Such an attitude seems exceedingly strange in a system of the law based mainly on the ground work provided by the Qur'an which embodies an essentially dynamic outlook on life.”<sup>1</sup>

Iqbal is fully aware of the intense conservatism of the Muslims of India and he actually laments such a situation. At one place, he writes : “Indian judges cannot but stick to what are called standard works. The result is that while the people are moving, the law remains stationary.”<sup>2</sup> At another place, he writes : The conservative Muslim public of this country is not yet quite ready for a critical

1. *The Reconstruction*, p. 149

2. *Ibid.*, p. 169.



discussion of Fiqh, which, if undertaken, is likely to displease most people and raise sectarian controversies.”<sup>3</sup>

Iqbal thinks that our environment constantly needs revision and that the tendency to over-organisation by a false reverence of the past is contrary to the inner impulse of Islam. He, time and again, appreciates Turkey, the only Muslim country in his view, which has outgrown this tendency by shaking off its dogmatic slumber and has attained to self-consciousness. “She alone has claimed her right of intellectual freedom; she alone has passed from the ideal to the real—transition which entails keen intellectual and moral struggle. To her the growing complexities of a mobile and broadening life are sure to bring new situations suggesting new points of view and necessitating fresh interpretations of principles which are only of an academic interest to a people who have never experienced the joy of spiritual expansion.”<sup>4</sup>

We may now take up few examples of Turkish Ijtihād which Iqbal himself endorses. According to the Sunni law, the appointment of an Imām or caliph is absolutely indispensable. Now Turkey’s Ijtihād is that this caliphate can be rested not only in a single person but also in a body of persons or an elected assembly. Thus, the “republican form of government is not only thoroughly consistent with the spirit of Islam but has also become a necessity in view of the new forces that are set free in the world of Islam.”<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, Turkey switched over to Turkish language so far as the practice and learning of Islam is concerned. Iqbal also fully agrees that religion can penetrate the soul of man “only if its spiritualizing ideas are clothed in his mother tongue.”<sup>6</sup> This displacement of Arabic by Turkish will again be condemned by most people in India.

Similarly, in Turkey, the equality between man and woman has been demanded in all matters concerning divorce, separation and inheritance. To some extent, Iqbal supports this view also and

3. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

quotes the following verse of the Qur'an in his support : "And for women are rights over men similar to those for men over women." According to Iqbal, the law of Islam has ever since been assimilative in nature and is fully capable of evolution. He firmly believes that there is no finality so far as Islamic law is concerned. At present there are many vexing problems before the Muslim public which need clear cut verdict from the Muslim learned scholars.

All said and done, Iqbal is fully aware of the pitfalls of liberalism which has a tendency to act as a force of disintegration. Thus, it is a most critical moment in the history of Islam. Moreover, on the preservation of the past depends a delicate question of the survival of the cultural identity. In fact, it is this fear of the loss of identity which stands in the way of change and modernization of the Muslims of India, though, of course, Muslim countries need not have this fear. They should have a permanent institution of Ijmā so that they may re-interpret and reconstruct Islamic laws to meet new requirements of an ever-growing universe.

## SECULARISM AND RELIGION : ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

As the very dichotomy of the title suggests, there exists a mutual exclusiveness between the two. Generally speaking, the term secularism stands for the belief that the State, morals, education, etc., should be independent of religion—a position which a religion will hardly cherish. Needless to say, here in India, we have enshrined secularism as a State-policy. In other words, our Constitution is secular—meaning thereby the State has no religion of its own. However, the secularism here is quite different than what is understood or practised, say, in U.S.S.R. In India, it is true, the State has no religion but it grants perfect freedom of religion and conscience to each of its citizens. Not only this, the Constitution grants freedom to establish and maintain institution of one's choice and to preserve one's culture,

If secularism is to be taken in the sense of freedom of religion, it can be asserted that Islam also stands for freedom of religion and conscience—it is averse to force or compulsion in such matters. The Qur'an is specific on the point. It says : "There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error. And he who rejects false deities and believes in God has grasped a firm handhold which will never break" (II.256). In this way, we see that the method of the Qur'an is persuasion not force. The war, according to Islam, is not for spreading religion but for subduing the force which are inimical to the Muslims and who resort to war and oppress them. Thus, the Qur'an says, "Fight in the way of God against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo !

God loves not aggressors." (II.190). And again, "But if they desist, then let there be no hostilities except against wrong doers. (II.193)" Moreover, in order to avoid clash with the followers of other religions, the Qur'an asks Muslims to tell them, "Unto you your religion, and unto me mine." (109 : 6).

Presently we have seen Qur'anic views on the freedom of religion. We can next see, even the Prophet of Islam and later on the caliphs faithfully pursued this path. The Prophet of Islam granted the first charter to the Jews of Medina which declared them to be as much the citizens of the new State as the Muslims themselves. And both of them were to form a composite nation and that "the guilty would be punished whatever their faith that both would be called upon to defend the State when need arose." Haroon Khan Sherwani regards this treaty as a great charter of the freedom of conscience and common citizenship.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Prophet gave a charter of freedom to the Christians of Najran "assuring them of their lives, property and religion, that they would have full liberty to practise their faith, that no bishop, monk or priest would be removed from his office, that no image or cross would be destroyed, that no tithes would be levied from them and that they would not be required to furnish any troops."<sup>2</sup>

In the same veins, we can find the Arab general, Khalid-ibn-Walid who subjugated the Christian Kingdom of Hira in Arabia during the reign of the first caliph, Abu Bakr. The general is said to have guaranteed the lives, liberty and property to the Christians and declared, "They shall not be prevented from playing Nakus (a sort of musical instrument) and taking out their crosses on occasions of festivals."<sup>3</sup> The result of such a religious freedom to co-religionists was this that the non-Muslims could practise their religion freely and build temples, churches and synagogues within the caliphate. Not only this, they were allowed to occupy high offices, military or civil, in the Muslim States. Even the Mughals here in India followed the same tradition. It must be said here that not all the Muslim rulers

1. Haroon Khan Sherwani; Studies in Muslim Political Thought and Administration, Lahore, 1945, p. 20.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

3. Abu Yusuf : Kitab-ul-Khiraj, p. 84.

after the four pious caliphs were inspired by the noble Islamic injunctions and that most of them were inspired by the lust of power and gold and they found Islam a very convenient, rather a forceful, cloak for their own mundane aspirations.

The Muslim rulers not only permitted the non-Muslims to freely practise their religions but also allowed them to be governed by their own laws in religious matters. As a matter of fact, the Muslim jurists have differentiated the religious laws from the secular by classifying them into two categories : (a) the religious laws and (b) non-religious or secular. The first category of laws is contained in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet of Islam. The second category of laws relates to "human dealings and world affairs. This portion may be called lawyer's law. It relates to the law of contract, sale, barter, trade, commerce, agriculture, etc. This division of law has undergone changes owing to the expansion of the empire and exigency of time."<sup>4</sup>

The distinction of religious and non-religious laws obviously meant that the non-Muslims were free to apply to them their own religious laws provided they were not immoral or against public policy. Religious laws of Islam were not applied to the people belonging to other religions. Let me quote at some length to clarify the point in question :

"The rule on this point runs thus : Zimmis (non-Muslim subject of a Muslim State) do not subject themselves to the laws of Islam, either with respect to things which are merely of a religious nature, such as fasting and prayer or with respect to such temporal acts as . . . the sale of wine or swine's flesh, because we (i.e., the jurists) have been commanded to leave them at liberty in all things which may be deemed by them to be proper, according to the precepts of their own faith. Therefore, with respect to all such things they are on the same footing as aliens. But fornication or illicit intercourse is to be excepted from the category, as that being held by all sects to be criminal. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

4. Wahed Husain; Theory of Sovereignty in Islam, Calcutta, 1934, p. 49. The discussion in this paragraph has reference to Shah Waliullah's Hujjat-al-Baligha and also to Shibli : 'Sirat-al-Numan'.

5. *Ibid.*, Quoted from "Fatawa-l-Alamgiri", p. 48.



Here we are confronted with an important question : Does Islam permit an Islamic State to make a similar distinction of religious and non-religious laws for its Muslim subjects ? This question obviously leads us to see whether Islam is a theocracy ? There are verses in the Qur'an which affirm that God is the only sovereign and that man is his vicegerent on earth. Thus, the rulers are not kings but caliphs or representatives of God on earth. And that God alternates the days of success and reverse amongst people—not arbitrarily but according to the principle of good and evil. "My righteous servants shall inherit the earth" (Qur'an : 21 : 105). Looked from this standpoint; there is nothing secular for a Muslim as the Qur'an contains minutest details concerning civil etiquettes, moral and personal laws, system of punishments and rules governing spiritual, religious, social, economic, political and international relations. All aspects of human life are to be governed by the precepts of Islam. This in fact is a position which has been adopted by the so called fundamentalists in Islam. According to them no aspect of human life can be exempted from the laws of the Qur'an. Thus, one writer towing this line says, "You cannot say on to Him (God), if you really and truly believe in Him, "We accept thy guidance and promise to obey thee in private life, but in matters which concern politics, economics, national and international politics, we reserve our freedom to follow our politicians, economists and financial experts." Such a reservation He would not stand, for He claims your undivided allegiance and brooks no association in His authority."<sup>6</sup> And the last conclusion of the author is, "... we want men who would transform the State into an agency of spiritual instruction and moral education. . . ."<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, we find authors who make a distinction of religious and temporal affairs and hold, "The theoretic character of Islamic State appears more in the application of law than in the constitution of the State. Its constitution has been more secular than theocratic; the only restriction being that the head of the State should be a Muslim as he is required to preside over the public prayer. In later times, the constitution of the Caliphate became more and more secular as there was no legal restriction on its membership. In fact, the able and talented Muslims and non-

6. M.M. Siddiqui; After Secularism What ? Delhi, 1981, p. 36.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

Muslims had a place in the administration of the States of Baghdad, Egypt, Spain and Turkey . . . a sharp distinction was drawn entrusting religious affairs to the Fiquah (Jurist), and the temporal affairs—civil and military, to the competent Muslims and non-Muslims alike.”<sup>8</sup> Hence the conclusion of Wahed Hussain is, “Thus it will be seen that the Islamic State was largely theocratic in character at its inception, but in course of time, it lost much of its theocratic elements.”<sup>9</sup> The author feels that the Muslim theologians and jurists have mixed up the laws of the Qur’an with secular laws and customs.

I would like to quote here another author who also separates the religious affairs from social and political affairs. He writes : “Though the basic source of the Muslim law is the Qur’an and the Hadith, the relations it regulates are, from no stand point, religious. They are social relations, well within the province of the State.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, he thinks that if the State enacts measures of social welfare and reform in respect of Muslim personal law, it will not infringe Article 29(1) as the cultural identity of the Muslims does not depend on their personal law which, in fact, several Muslim countries including Pakistan, have modified and this has not changed their culture a bit.

In the foregoing pages, we have given the position of the two points of views. It is not possible, nor do we think ourselves competent enough, to arbitrate between these two antagonistic positions. Another closely related question here is : even if we grant that the Muslims should have separate personal laws of Islam, can these laws be re-interpreted and reconstructed in the light of new requirements ? Or in other words, is Ijtibād (renovation) possible ? This question has also been answered in two different ways—one group affirming and the other denying the possibility of change or movement in the structure of Islam. Iqbal can be said to belong to the former group. He found Muslim India of his days unwilling to change itself. Thus, at one place, he says,

8. Wahed Hussain; *Theory of Sovereignty in Islam*, pp. 46-47.

9. *Ibid*, p. 49.

10. Mohammad Ghouse; *Secularism, Society and Law in India*, Delhi 1973, pp. 227-29.

„unfortunately, the conservative Muslim public of this country is not yet quite ready for a critical discussion of ‘Fiqh’ which, if undertaken, is likely to displease most people, and raise sectarian controversies. . . .”<sup>11</sup> Not only this, Iqbal regards the demand of the present day Muslim liberals to re-interpret the foundational legal principles, in the light of their own experience and the altered conditions of modern life, as ‘perfectly justified.’<sup>12</sup>

In the conclusion, it can be said that though Islam has been generally regarded a polity, it grants perfect freedom to the followers of other religions in its fold and from this point of view it can well-adjust itself with the type of secularism our country has enshrined in her constitution. And if democracy is a necessary accompaniment of the Indian political system. Islam is really democratic and republican in its spirit in so far as the early caliphate depended on the popular franchise and was answerable to the electorate. Certainly this spirit was shrouded in the later days to come. One writer feels that India had to be a secular country even if there were no Muslims or no Christians. For, it hardly needs mention that besides Hinduism, there are the followers of Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism and Hinduism itself has got several sects within its fold.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the plurality and diversity of religions and cultures in India is her pride and privilege. Let us make this a source of strength and not a weakness making it truly ‘secular’ which means, perfect freedom of conscience and respect to all religions. Islam enjoins the love of one’s neighbour regardless of his religion, caste or creed and the definition of the neighbourhood widens even as our scientific and technological age shrinks the space.

It is not wise on the part of any religion in a secular country as ours to think in terms of supremacy or ascendancy. Let every individual be a fine embodiment of one’s own religion and by that let him show perfect humility, tolerance and compassion to the followers of other religions—that is the right way to India’s progress

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11. Mohammad Iqbal; *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahore, 1944, p. 164.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

13. M. Ghose; *Secularism, Society and Law in India*, p. 8.

and fulfilment. Aggression, violence, hatred and communalism have resulted time and again in the enormous loss of life and property and have certainly retarded our progress to that extent. Every religion regards itself superior to others; however, it cannot be so imposed but through example that it can expose itself to others' through critical examination and judgment—the perennial method of Philosophy.

## 8

### THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY IN SRI AUROBINDO'S CONTEXT

Here in India, Philosophy has always been regarded as one that shows the path of happiness. That at once brings Philosophy down to earth to be a guidance, rather a reasoned guidance, in our earthly problems. This means, here in India, Philosophy should never be regarded a discipline for one who sits in an ivory tower unconcerned with the trials and tribulations of our earthly life. A true philosophy should not be divided into the dichotomy of Idealism and Materialism and with that the dichotomy of a host of other accompanying traits such as tendermindedness and tough-mindedness, rationalism and empiricism, optimism and pessimism, freedom and determinism, a classification which was so eloquently presented by William James in his book 'Pragmatism'. In short, Idealism and Materialism are not two mutually excluding extremes but two complementaries which need to be synthesised to present a total world-view. Moreover, there is nothing new or radical about this approach. We are quite conversant with two celebrated Upaniṣadic statements—one affirming the unity and oneness of Brahman (*i.e.*, Ekamevādvitīyam) and the other glorifying, rather identifying Brahman with the externally visible reality (*i.e.*, Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma) Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was fully alive to the problem of the dichotomy of the two statements and his own solution flowed from him so spontaneously. Thus, in his magnum opus "The Life Divine," he claimed that the two statements in question have not been read in the sufficient light of each other whereas both are equally imperative. Sri Aurobindo was emphatic that unless we are able to do full justice in dealing with the "Matter" *i.e.*, "the descending movement of the Divine leaning downward to embrace



eternally its manifestation,"<sup>1</sup> we cannot have a complete vision of the reality. It is the same truth which the Upaniṣads tried to convey by ascribing seemingly opposite attributes to the one and the same reality e.g., Sat and Asat, one and many, transcendent and immanent, invisible and visible.

All this is to emphasis that there is nothing profane in this world. On the contrary, it is a reality to be 'reckoned with'.<sup>2</sup> Hence the adoption of a positivistic and empirical attitude towards the world is of utmost importance. That this attitude though ingrained in the Vedic culture from the very beginning, was repeatedly shrouded by the ascetics and the correct view of spirituality often lost its sway on the people and thus resulted in decadence and poverty of life until the modern western thought brought it to lime-light and precisely for this reason, Sri Aurobindo was full of appreciation of the West and its scientific outlook on things. Thus he remarked :

"Still they worshipped no mean godheads. Reason, Science, progress, freedom, humanity were their idols, and which of these idols, if idols they are, would we like or ought we, if we are wise, to cast down into the mire or leave as poor unworshipped relics on the wayside."<sup>3</sup>

It is quite clear from the above that the present-day philosophy ought not to create unbridgeable gulf between Idealism and materialism. Both theories be regarded as upholding two poles of our existence and hence both should be synthesised in order to form a total world-view. In this connection, we have to appreciate Sri Aurobindo's thought for highlighting concept like 'Integral knowledge' which synthesises empirical, rational and intuitional knowledge and the concept like 'Integral Yoga' which seeks to develop physical, mental and spiritual being of man here and now—the establishment of the divine life on earth.

But the real paradox is that in spite of these clear-cut ideas in the field of metaphysics, ethics and religion, we are somehow a

1. The Life Divine, p. 36.

2. Iqbal's expression.

3. Sri Aurobindo ; Evolution, p. 33.

from our destination. Religions have their own way. However, it may be asserted that today they are becoming more and more ritualistic rather than moral and religious—a stage which dominated the period of Brahmanas and against which the Upaniṣads were a reaction.

Presently we are faced with the problems such as violence, corruption and lawlessness. Shall we not, then, say that man is increasingly becoming more and more barbarous and lawless. We are bound to feel that the social contract theory of Rousseau is rapidly collapsing. Man is again a wolf. We need resurrect a second Rousseau and work out some new theory which may provide a sense of security and peace in the society and may re-establish that old bond of social fabric whose very warp and woof were mutual trust and co-operation. Scientific and technological advancement has brought the world so closer that physical distance is virtually obliterated. But on the contrary, it has resulted only in an increase in emotional distance.

Then there is a danger of a nuclear holocaust and it is looming large on the whole world. We can say, in short, that the problem of evil and suffering is being felt in its entirety and with enormity. According to Sri Aurobindo, on no theory of extra-cosmic God can we solve this problem. We cannot say that God has created suffering for his creatures. If suffering exists and it does exist, it is God Himself who suffers in the individual in whom He has embodied Himself. That at once puts the problem straightaway. It is our duty to fight and conquer the forces of evil and suffering which threaten our life. According to Sri Aurobindo, the forces of evil and suffering are the deliberate creation of God. The following verses from his poem 'Rakshasas' are very illustrative as they throw light on the fact as to how the evil and satanic forces help amplify our life on earth.

"Hearken what Ravana cries against the stars,  
Demanding earth for heritage. Advise,  
Shall he then have it? and a cry arose  
'He would root out the Brahmins from the earth,  
Impose his dreadful Yoga on mankind  
And make the violent heart, the iron hand,  
Sovereign of all'. Sri Krishna made reply,

'From out Myself he went to do my will  
He has not lied, he has the knowledge. He  
And I are one. How then shall I refuse ?

He puts the Vanara out of the world,  
Accustoming to grandeur all mankind  
.....were he denied  
His period, man could not progress.  
But since  
He sees himself as Me, not Me in him,  
And takes the life and body for the whole,  
He cannot last. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

This is the crux of the matter. The forces of evil and suffering are at their fullest play. But all this is willed by God so that man may be strong and victorious and may progress through the struggle with these forces. Here is a programme for philosophy to prepare itself for social action. The achievements of all other sciences stand in dire need of a discipline like philosophy which can harmonise and synthesise them in order to form a healthy, universal and humanitarian outlook on life and world,

Lastly, we need not be enamoured of the contemporary western philosophical movements. There is a truth in these movements to the extent they seek to modify our linguistic expressions to be meaningful. But to deny the possibility of all metaphysics is to go beyond their jurisdiction. Metaphysical speculations will continue to be made regardless of the fact that they are unverifiable. Such speculations are ingrained in human nature and are part of man's curiosity to know the unknown. It is true, man's intuitive conclusions will not be exact but who knows they may be sure approximations to the understanding of the ultimate Reality.

4. Iqbal expressed the same meaning in an Urdu verse which is translated as follows :

"On the morn of the life, why did he (Satan) dare disobey you (i.e., God) ?  
How can I know ? He is your secret-knower not mine."

These lines refer to the Qur'anic episode of the fall of Adam.

# 9

## THE FUTURE OF MORALS

In 1924, C.E.M. Joad wrote a book entitled "The Future of Morals" which he had good fortune to revise in 1946. The subject of the book is very fascinating and lively. Let us see what is the present position *vis-a-vis* the morals some four decades hence.

Joad refers to Thrasymachus who is a character in Plato's 'Republic'. According to him, justice means social morality which consists in 'the interest of the stronger'. For, the stronger control the government and make the laws which are obviously contrived to serve themselves. Abiding these laws is termed as 'morality'. Thus, justice implies subservience by the subjects and is thus the interest of the stronger. Presently we are no nearer to any better definition of justice to improve upon one given by Thrasymachus.

Joad refers to Hobbes' social contract theory and says that man is by nature wicked. He is made peaceable and moral by the fear of consequences. "Let a man, for example, learn how to become invisible at will and, as Plato points out, no virgin would be safe, no strong-box unruffled. Man, then, is made moral by law; he is not moral by nature."<sup>1</sup> The present state of affairs is that the fear of consequences has banished because of several factors, prominent of them being nepotism, bribery and a complicated and long-drawn legal process which relies more on evidence than on facts. Most of the criminal cases go unpunished since generally such crimes have no

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1. The Future of Morals, London, p. 7.

witnesses and if there be any, they dare not bear witness for fear of reprisal by the criminals at some later stage.

A recent trend which is becoming dominant in India and abroad is to plead for more humane and kinder punishments in place of what they call primitive and barbaric punishments. From this point of view, according to some protagonists, death punishment should be done away with. Here the pertinent questions are : Have the murders, rapes and other crimes become any-the-less primitive and barbaric ? Is not the nature of these crimes the same as in olden days ? Is not the dignity and value of human life the same as before ? Why, then, the punishment be not as harsh and exemplary as before ? Sometimes an argument is brought from the field of Abnormal Psychology in favour of milder or no punishment at all. It is asserted that the criminals are mental patients and they need comforting and rehabilitation rather than punishment. Firstly, to rate all criminals as patients is a worst type of generalization. Secondly, while it is a common observation that the punishment have desirable effects even on animals, why will not the punishments have desirable effect on the criminals and serve as deterrent to future offenders ?

The pleaders of more humane and kinder punishment do nothing but exhibit their own guilty conscience. They seek in fact their own escape through such idealisation. These people are generally influential and are at the helm of affairs. No wonder, they succeed in extorting legislation in their favour. These are some of the reasons which are responsible for a gradual decline in the fear of consequences which is the main safe-guard against devilish part of man's nature.

## 2

Joad wishes to apply the concept discussed in the preceding section to the present and to the immediate future—the concept that the justice is the interest of the stronger that passes for morality. In the present days of democracy, the common man and the crowd or herd of such men is said to be 'stronger'. But, according to Joad, in reality they are 'weaker'. In his support, he quotes from Plato's Dialogue—Gorgias—to hold that the majority of people is stupid,



irresolute, apathetic; mediocre, timid and unimaginative. " . . . Taken severally men may be individuals, taken together they are a mere transmitting medium for herd emotion. Their individual stupidities are added together, but their individual wisdom cancel out."<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to what Joad may believe about democracy, it should be added to the credit of the Indian democracy that in 1977 it dethroned a well-entrenched Congress government and again after about two years it dethroned Janata government for its lack of cohesion and lack of the ability to administer the country. Thus, the Indian democracy promises to be a deterrent to any future erring, capricious and ego-centric government. However, the pitfalls and the dangers to our democracy are no less pronounced. The foremost of these is the increasing role of money and use of physical force to elicit votes in favour of the candidates contesting elections. This inhibits the possibility of any honest and deserving candidate being elected if he is short of money and brute-force.

Besides the use of money and violence, there is yet another enemy of free and fair elections in India. This is the division of the electorate on the considerations of religion and caste. It can be asserted that any government in India can safely rule the country for a long time so long it is possible here to divide people on the basis of religion and caste. Till these divisive factors continue to operate, people cannot form a cognisable force. A selfish and ego-centric government can always exploit these factors to its own advantage and remain in the saddle. All said and done about the pitfalls of democracy, it remains, by and large, a lesser evil. For, if once an ego-centric, capricious and dictatorial type of government becomes entrenched in power, there is no way out to dethrone such a government except democracy.

### 3

Joad's views regarding marriage as having its basis in economic dependence of the women stand in need of close analysis. If

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2. The Future of Morals, London, p. 16.

economic dependence of the women was the total truth about the institution of marriage, they should have long ceased to be contracted in all such cases where the women's social and economic status was higher or superior. But we do have marriages where women are economically independent. However, it is to be acknowledged that there is some truth in Joad's thesis. This is evident by the greater frequency of divorces where the wives are economically independent and it is evident also by the fact that nowadays the majority of such women prefers to remain unmarried throughout their life. It is astonishing to note that whenever the wives have been confronted with the choice between their husbands and their jobs, they have generally opted for the latter.

Joad's assertion that the women employ their body to get economic benefits through the institutions of marriage, is quite offending. Today's women are in a position to buy the sex rather than sell it. Joad suggests that marriage should not be contracted between the two earning spouses. The modern trend, however, is that more and more men compelled by economic reasons, are preferring employed women as their spouses.

It is to be admitted on all counts that if a woman enjoys economic independence, she may end an unhappy wedlock more easily. Perhaps this is a major factor behind the increasing number of divorces here and abroad. In foreign countries, divorces sometimes occur on flimsy grounds. Here in India because of joint family system and because of the fact that marriages are generally contracted between close relations, divorces are not possible on flimsy grounds. At any rate here in India, divorces still carry a stigma with them. They are made only when the reasons become overwhelming. However, it can safely be asserted that with the increase in women's economic independence, the number of divorces is bound to increase. We find that today, more and more women prefer to remain unmarried because they enjoy economic independence. They claim to be a happy lot in the sense they refuse to accept the slavery by men. But there are enough reasons to believe that as their years advance they may lose all the meaningfulness in life which is available in abundance to married women who have their children around them and the old age has brought their husbands still closer into a still deeper friendship matured by all the years goneby. With

those ideas, we can infer that whatever the circumstances, marriage will continue to be a cherished goal for the majority of men and women.

## 4

This section deals with Joad's assessment of the year 1936 and the future prospects. He had anticipated a puritan revival. But even today we are no nearer to puritan revival. Joad forecasts, "Equalitarianism between the sexes is likely to diminish and the power exercised by men over women to increase."<sup>3</sup> But it does not seem to be the case. The world has lately seen several women heads of the States and they have been occupying other important posts also, both academic and administrative. He is right to anticipate "a new respect for marriage supported by propaganda in favour of the family and the home."<sup>4</sup> Joad's forecast of a return to a stricter morality is not true. Irregular sex has increased. So has hypocrisy. "Hypocrisy prevails when the pretence of virtue in important and the practice of vice easy."<sup>5</sup>

## 5

This section reviews the prospects of the morals in the post-Second World War period. That is, it has been written after 1945—aftermath of the War. This period marks the death of Nazism and Fascism. Joad has here discarded his earlier belief that the "communities in which the average man is the 'stronger' have always been noted for their Puritanism."<sup>6</sup> According to him, in war time, "Puritanism is at a discount, the god of battles is also, inevitably, the god of brothels. . . . As Lord Elton has put it, the family was the first and most tragic casualty of the war."<sup>7</sup> Illegitimate births are the result of the war.

Joad rightly anticipated that "barbarism would grow and civility decline."<sup>8</sup> Today's man is growing more and more violent. In

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3. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

spite of our all claims to have become civilized, even in this 20th century we have witnessed the Nazi brutalities of the concentration camps, atomic-bomb havoc at Hiroshima and Nagasaki wars and other bloody strifes in the name of religion and caste.

Joad points out that now-a-days is a growing tendency for only planned small families. According to him, two factors are responsible for it. First, contraceptive devices are available easily. Secondly, people have to place values on material possessions, e.g., a house, car or fridge or even on bettering their careers in life.

Lastly, we may refer to some of the recent trends in human relationships to persons, places and things which are marked by increasing transience or impermanence. These changes have been discussed at length by Alvin Toffler in his shocking book, "Future Shock." According to him, commitments are shifting from place-related social structures (e.g., city, State, nation or neighbourhood) to those that are themselves mobile, fluid and placeless (e.g., corporation, profession or friendship). These relationships change today at a faster speed with our super-industrialism. This results in fragmentation of relationships—what we term as alienation and about which today's existentialism has much to lament.<sup>9</sup> Today's man has got the relations for decreasing duration in the following order : Family—kins—friends—neighbours—colleagues and club-members. This has important adverse effects on morals. First, today's man does not consider marriage a commitment for the whole life-time and thus it results in greater number of family break-ups and divorces. Secondly, since he is not place-bound, his relations with the society and neighbours are marked by pragmatism and hence are very fragile. Good-neighbourliness is becoming a thing of past and society is becoming lesser and lesser effective in curbing morally reprehensible behaviour. Again, the concept of social out-cast has become a thing of the past. Certainly this does not augur well from the point of view of morals.

Another phenomenon of recent origin is the 'collapse of hierarchy'.<sup>10</sup> We are perceiving increasing decline in respect for

9. Alvin Toffler : Future Shock (New York, 1977), p. 97.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 137.

parents, teachers and other superiors. From this point of view, we find that the educational institutions of today are faced with the enormous problem of maintaining discipline by the help of teaching community and that the police-help in keeping peace on campuses is becoming increasingly unavoidable. In many institutions, even for invigilation-duties in the examinations, police-help has been sought. This collapse of hierarchy manifests itself also in today's man's commitment to job and the consequent fall in his efficiency.

In future, whatever may happen to our age-old concepts of family and motherhood is evident from the following extracts from Alvin Toffler : "The most obviously upsetting force likely to strike the family in the decades immediately ahead will be the impact of the new birth technology. The ability to pre-set the sex of one's baby, or even to programme its IQ, looks and personality traits, must now be regarded as a real possibility."<sup>11</sup> When babies can be grown in a laboratory jar, what happens to the very notion of maternity?"

"Furthermore, if embryos are for sale, can a corporation buy one? Can it buy ten thousand? Can it resell them? . . . If we buy and sell living embryos, are we back to a new form of slavery? Such are the nightmarish questions to be debated by us."<sup>12</sup>

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11. *Ibid.*, p. 239.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 241.



## IBN TOFAIL'S STORY OF HAYY IBN YAQZĀN

Ibn Tofail was a great Spanish Muslim Philosopher of 12th century A.D. He belonged to an Arab tribe. In his early career, he was a practising physician and it was by virtue of his fame in this field that he was appointed secretary to the governor of the province of Granada. Later on he became physician and Qazi of the court and vizier to the Muwahhid Caliph, Abū Yaqub Yusuf (r 1163—1184). The caliph has been credited for giving patronage to philosophical thought and scientific method. After his death in 1184, he was succeeded by his son, Abu Yusuf al-Mansur (d. 1199). Both Ibn Tofail and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), another great Spanish philosophers were the two great celebrities of the court of these Muwahhid rulers who were known for their belief in the unity of God and their emphasis on the exoteric aspect of Islam (Sharia). About philosophy their position was that it was an esoteric discipline and was meant for the enlightened few.<sup>1</sup> All these elements are amply reflected in Ibn Tofail's celebrated work 'Hayy Ibn Yaqzān' which proves that he was a great philosopher, physician, mathematician and astronomer. He died at Morocco in 1185-86. Let us see in some details his great master-piece 'Hayy Ibn Yaqzān' which has been regarded as one of the most remarkable and original books of the Middle Ages<sup>2</sup> and which has been translated from original Arabic into almost all the important languages of the world.

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1. D.B. MacDonald : Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory, pp. 251-54.
  2. Encyclopaedia of Islam, Vol. II, p. 425. Also G. Sarton : Introduction to the History of Science, Vol. II, p. 354.

## HAYY IBN YAQZĀN

It is an allegory through which Ibn Tofail has tried to put forward his philosophical and religious views. The title literally means 'Living son of the Active One.' By the help of this allegory, Ibn Tofail seeks to illustrate that a man brought up in isolation from the society can reach the same heights in the knowledge of philosophy, religion and mysticism as the one who has been cultured and educated by the human society. De Boer has rightly remarked : "... the hero of Ibn Tofail's romance seems to be personification of the natural spirit of Mankind illuminated from above."<sup>3</sup>

The author mentions in the allegory two versions of the birth of the child, Hayy. According to the first version, the child's birth on a dissolute island is traced to a spontaneous generation out of a mass of earth which got fermented due to harmonious and equable conditions of heat and cold, moisture and dryness. In a scientific manner, Ibn Tofail mentions in details how that mass of fermented earth developed automatically into a full-grown child just as one develops in one's mother's womb. That mass assumed the form of flesh and bones and his bodily faculties including liver, heart and brain were formed. Later a soul was infused into this body by the command of God. The soul emanated from God just like the light from the sun. Thus, a human infant was born complete in all respects without human parents.

By another version which is legendary, the child was thrown into the sea from a neighbouring island by his mother, a princess, who wanted to keep secret the fact of her marriage to Hayy's father, Yaqzan, out of fear of the king, her brother, who would not have tolerated this union of the two. The new-born child placed in an ark drifted to this uninhabited island on the tidal waves. The story hence-forth is common to both the versions. The next point is to see how the child on this uninhabited island survived initially with the suckling by a roe whose own fawn had died and who felt compassion for Hayy and how through his own ingenuity and resources, the child grew up into an adult and acquired metaphysical, religious and mystical knowledge of his own, quite comparable to the knowledge

3. T.J. De Boer : History of Philosophy in Islam, London, 1965, p. 185.

one gets as a result of his training and education by the human society unknown to Hayy.

Hayy began to develop under the loving care of the roe. She suckled him for two years and showed him places of fruit and water and he began to move and walk of his own. He learnt to imitate voices of animals and through this he became friendly with them.

Reaching the age of seven, Hayy developed the power of imagination and thinking. He also began to conceptualize things which he had earlier perceived. He compared himself with other animals and found himself slow, weak and defenceless as compared to the rest of the animals. He developed also a sense of shame to see his nakedness and began to cover his private parts with leaves. He made clubs out of twigs to use them as weapon for his defence from the attack of other animals. Thus, he became conscious of the superiority of his hands over other animals. Seeing the disadvantages of the leaves which got dried up and fell as under, he tried the tails of dead animals and the wings and skin of a dead vulture successfully to cover his bodily parts. Obviously he could reason out their relative advantages and disadvantages.

After some time the roe became old and weak and ultimately died. Hayy was greatly pained because of her death and he began to think about its possible cause. He was led to reason out that the main source of life should be located in the breast which houses the heart which is constantly beating within it. In order to discover the cause Hayy opened the breast of the roe with the help of flints and splinters of dry cane. He found out the heart of the roe and he discovered that it had two cavities one of which was filled with the clotted blood and the other was vacant. He argued that something has gone out of this vacant part and it is this that should primarily be responsible for the death of the roe. And therefore, it was her real essence. When the body began to decompose, he buried the dead body, an act which he learnt from a crow which had killed its companion in the fight and buried it. In this way, after examining the heart of the dead roe, Hayy reached the concept of a soul which is the driving force behind each body and in the absence of which the animals die. The body is only an instrument for the soul. He also

realized that there was no one like him in the island. Thus, he became conscious of his uniqueness amongst the other animals of the island.

One day there was a fire in the jungle due to friction in the branches of the trees. Hayy was surprized to see this phenomenon. He felt fire's burning power by touching it with his fingers. He took a burning stick to his cave and kept it burning by adding fresh fuel. He got heat and light from it during night. He used to throw into the fire everything to see its all-consuming power. Gradually he learnt to eat flesh of animals after roasting it on fire. He now started hunting animals also.

The wonderful power of the fire led him to argue that the soul must be akin to it since the body of an animal is warm so long it is alive; it becomes cold just after death. He dissected a wild animal and discovered that the left cavity of the heart was filled with airy vapour which was intolerably hot. He regarded it as the animal's soul which kept it warm and its absence resulted in death. He continued to know more about the parts of animal bodies through dissection and thus his knowledge in this field became quite rich.

Hayy reached the concept of the unity of all animals on the basis of the sameness of their spirits in spite of the differences in their bodily organs and external forms. He came to know that bodily organs are connected with the spirit through nerves. Motion and nutrition are the two main functions of the soul. By the age of twenty one, Hayy had made all these discoveries. He also learnt to make his clothes and shoes out of animal skins. He made a house for himself. He also made weapons by fixing sharp horns of animals on the top of the staff. He tamed wild horses and used them for riding. He tamed the birds of prey and used them for hunting. He also kept poultry for eggs and chicken.

Hayy observed different kinds of physical bodies, animals, plants, minerals, earth, water vapour, snow, flame, etc. and reached the conclusion that in spite of differences, there was fundamental unity amongst them with regard to shape and functions in the same species of animals. Similarly all the species resembled one another in sensation, nutrition and movement. As the multiplicity of bodily parts

does not affect the individuality and unity of a person, so also the multiplicity of different bodies does not affect the unity of the spirit in them. It is as if the same water may be poured in different vessels, yet it remains the same.

Similarly he examined all the species of the plants and found that they all agree in having nutrition and growth as common characteristics. After this he considered all the animals and plants together and found them resembling one another in having nutrition and growth. Thus, he concluded that all of them are one in having the spirit which was more perfect in the case of animals and less perfect in the case of plants. In the next step, he included minerals also in his observation and he concluded that all the animals, plants and minerals are one in having physical bodies though their functions differ because of some attributes superadded to them and it is these qualities that make them different species with differing individualities. As Z.A. Siddiqi says, this distinction of body and its qualities superadded to it corresponds with the distinction of matter and form as upheld by Plato and other philosophers.<sup>4</sup> The determination of form of a thing is the work of our rational faculty. He also reached the concept of the hierarchy in these forms and extension as forming the essence of corporeity.

Next Hayy realized that the changes occur in the forms of the bodies and the ultimate and efficient cause of these changes is an Agent who is the controller of bodily functions and who is unaffected by the changes and imperfections in the body. By now he had attained the age of twenty eight. He observed the movements of the sun, moon and other heavenly bodies. He reached the conclusion that they are finite and spherical in shape and all things taken together formed what we call universe.

Hayy debated with himself the question of the eternity or created nature of the world and could not decide either way. However, he formed the concept of an immaterial Agent or Creator of the world. From the wonderfulness of His creation and His benevolence for His creatures, he concluded that this agent possessed the attributes of knowledge, wisdom, power, beauty, elegance and perfection. He

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4. Z.A. Siddiqi; Philosophy of Ibn Tufayl, Aligarh, 1965, p. 42.



is also free of all imperfections. By now Hayy had attained the age of thirty five years. He regarded the supreme Agent as a necessarily existent Being and His Knowledge became possible only through his (man's) spiritual essence and not through his sense-organs.

From the fact of bodies being subject to corruption and change, he inferred the immortality of his soul. He wanted to spend his time in the spiritual contemplation of the necessarily existent Being till death overtook him so that he might have His vision. For the realization of this goal, he desired to satisfy the three requirements of his being—physical, animal and spiritual. For, in the absence of the satisfaction of his physical and animal being, his very sustenance in life would be impossible. He imitated the heavenly bodies by doing benevolent acts and by keeping his body and clothes clean. In order to attain spiritual contemplation, he cut himself off from all kinds of bodily associations and retired to a secluded life for days together. In his first attempt, everything obliterated except his own self. In the second step, his own self also disappeared and he could concentrate only on one truly self-existent Necessary Being. In this stage he saw such splendour and beauty that no "eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it ever entered into the heart of man to conceive."<sup>5</sup> This was Hayy Ibn Yaqzan's mystical experience which could be compared to a state of intoxication or ecstasy. Ibn Tofail seeks to describe Hayy's mystical experiences but cautions us that these descriptions be taken only figuratively. He became more and more apt in attaining to these mystical experiences and for longer duration too. By then he had reached the age of fifty.

At this stage, Ibn Tofail brings in the story of two other men—Salmān and Asāl who lived in a neighbouring island opposite to that of Hayy's. They followed a religion *i.e.*, Islam, which taught its followers with the help of parables and metaphors. Salmān believed in the exoteric side of the religion and he managed to be the ruler of that island. Asāl, having mystical tendencies and a life of deep contemplation, believed in the esoteric aspect of religion. In order to pursue his life of devotion and meditation on God in seclusion, he came to Hayy's island which he had thought to be uninhabited. Hayy himself was given to a kind of ascetic life and kept himself engrossed

5. Simon Ockley : The History of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, London, p. 140.

in meditation in his cave for days together and he would come out only to satisfy his hunger and thirst once a week. One day Asal chanced to see Hayy whom he recognized as another man in the island and hence he ran away to avoid Hayy's company least his privacy was disturbed. Hayy, on his part, saw Asal who was first man he came across in his life.

Hayy found Asal as resembling him and he wanted to know more about him. So he approached Asal who was first afraid to meet him but later on he began to behave normally. Hayy communicated with him by the help of gestures as he did not understand the language spoken by Asal. Asal gave him some of the food he had brought with him from his island. He hesitatingly tasted a little of it since he was taking it against the austere rules he had set for himself. In order to initiate Hayy in his own religion, Asal taught him his language gradually. When he was able to express himself in language, Hayy related his whole story to Asal. He was astonished to find that Hayy had already experienced, of his own, mystically all he knew only symbolically about God, Angels, Books, Messengers, Day of Judgement, Heaven and Hell through his religion. Hence he regarded Hayy as a saint and accepted him as his guide and teacher. Hayy, in turn, was apprised by Asal of the life and society and the type of religion in vogue in his own island. He also at once recognized the truth of the religious doctrines conveyed to him by Asal and accepted them as truly conveyed by the messenger of God. He promptly accepted the prophethood of the messenger of God *i.e.*, Prophet Mohammad and promised to follow all the precepts preached by him

However, Hayy had certain misgivings with the religion of the Prophet. First, why is the truth of the religion conveyed through metaphors and parables. Secondly, why does the religion allow man's indulgence in worldly sensuous pleasures. Similarly he could not understand the relevance of the system of punishments in religion. He went to Asal's island to preach his own ideas and to his astonishment and disappointment, he found that the people of that island regarded Hayy's teachings as repugnant. His teachings went over their heads. Thus, he became convinced that the masses cannot understand the truth of pure religion and philosophy; the religion taught by the Messenger is the only right course for them wherein

lies their salvation. He realized his folly and together with Asal, he returned back to his own island to lead a life of devotion and contemplation of God in the hope of having His vision. The story of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan comes to an end here.

### PHILOSOPHICAL ELEMENTS IN THE STORY OF HAYY IBN YAQZAN

We have seen in the very beginning that the story of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan is an allegory and it is through its medium that Ibn Tofail wants to convey his philosophical ideas. One of the most pronounced features of this story is Ibn Tofail's distinction between philosophy and religion. Though he regards both of them as aiming at the same truth, he is convinced that the philosophy is an esoteric discipline and that it is meant for a selected few. It is beyond the reach of the majority of people. For them, the only way open is religion which is exoteric in its approach and takes the help of symbols in order to make the people understand the truth. The two disciplines are meant for two different types of people and efforts to transgress into each other's discipline are bound to fail.

Next we find that the question of God has been given a wide coverage in the story of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan. In an effort to prove the existence of God, Ibn Tofail proceeds to trace the cause of generation and corruption and reaches the concept of first cause in order to avoid infinite regress. The same is applied to the change of forms of the bodies which again needs causes and by tracing them we reach the first cause which itself is immaterial and necessarily existent, *i.e.*, God. Another way of establishing the existence of God, according to Ibn Tofail, is to refer to the mystical experiences or intuition of the individuals. These experiences are immediate, unique and personal and hence others cannot be convinced of their truth because of their incommunicability.<sup>6</sup>

As regards the relation of God and soul, Ibn Tofail believes in the theory of emanation according to which the soul proceeds from the immaterial essence of God just like the light from the sun. This emanation does not affect the immutability and perfection of God.

6. Z.A. Siddiqi; Philosophy of Ibn Tufayl, Aligarh, 1965, p. 64,

There are many other philosophical problems, such as the status of the world, the concept of reward and punishment in the hereafter, the summum bonum of human life, the vision of God and the union with God, which have been discussed in the story of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan. We have omitted them because of the limited space at our disposal. Our main aim here has been to present, in brief, the allegory in question and to arouse the reader's interest in this great philosophical work of Ibn Tofail.

## SRI AUROBINDO AND ASCETICISM

A generally prevalent notion in India and elsewhere is that Sri Aurobindo, the great mystic, poet and philosopher of modern India, was an ascetic. If not an ascetic, his philosophy, at any rate, teaches asceticism. But it is a mistaken view as it will be clear from a study of his life and works.

But before we proceed on to remove the above misunderstanding about Sri Aurobindo, let us see, who is, after all, an ascetic. An ascetic is one who practises extreme self-denial for spiritual realisation. For this purpose, he also observes austerities; keeps himself aloof from worldly affairs; avoids matrimony and is usually a recluse. Such ascetics have been found in every age and in every country. Generally Brahmins, Buddhists, Christians, Stoics, Egyptians and certain Sufis have been practising asceticism in one form or other.

In the above sense of the word, Sri Aurobindo cannot be regarded as an ascetic. The confusion regarding Sri Aurobindo's actual position is, perhaps, due to the word 'Yoga' which is the soul of his teaching. G.H. Langley also remarks that the Western minds are apt to take the meaning of 'Yoga' in the sense of asceticism, renunciation of the world and the observance of physical austerities.<sup>1</sup> And they will not be wrong in their belief; for, in the long history of Indian thought, there were times when 'Yoga' was interpreted to mean asceticism. But this is not the only conception of Yoga found in Indian philosophy. The definition of 'Yoga' as given in Bhagvad-

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1. G.H. Langley : Sri Aurobindo, p. 60.



Gita is as old as Indian civilization itself. Here Shri Krishna explaining the true meaning of Yoga to Arjuna says 'Yoga is skill in actions (works).'<sup>2</sup> This definition gives no chance of interpreting Yoga as life-shunning asceticism.

Similarly, the use of the word 'Yoga' by Sri Aurobindo is very peculiar to him. The very sentence, 'All life is Yoga'<sup>3</sup> gives a very wide connotation to Yoga. According to him, the real use of Yoga lies in reorganising and perfecting the human life in this world. Elucidating his concept of Yoga, Sri Aurobindo says :

'In the right view both of life and of Yoga, all life is either consciously or subconsciously a-Yoga. For we mean by this term a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the potentialities latent in the being and a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence we see partially expressed in man and in the cosmos.'<sup>4</sup>

In this way, according to Sri Aurobindo, one, ineffable and Absolute Brahman has involved itself in the inconscience of Matter in the form of Sachchidananda.<sup>5</sup> The process of manifestation of this world begins with the evolution of this Sachchidananda out of this involved state. As to the question, why One Inalienable Brahman subjects itself to the processes of involution and evolution, separate discussion is needed. Suffice it here to say that it is the delight of existence, the delight of struggle and strife, the joy of coming victorious out of the battle with its opposites that Brahman takes to self-manifestation. Thus, to Sri Aurobindo, the world is a real manifestation of the real Brahman.

The whole of Nature is engaged in this work of manifesting explicitly the involved Sachchidananda—her inherent potentialities—the evolution being her instrument. Thus, we can say that Nature has got her own peculiar Yoga by which she is striving to realise perfection through being a true and exact manifestation of Sachchidananda, the involved infinite Brahman. In the emergence

2. Bhagvad-Gita, Chapter II, Shaloka, 50.

3. On Yoga, I (The Synthesis of Yoga), p. 7.

4. On Yoga, I (The Synthesis of Yoga), p. 4.

5. The triune of Sat (Existence), Chit (Consciousness) and Ananda (Bliss).

of man on earth, she has got a self-conscious and thinking collaborator in her mission. Hence as Swami Vivekananda called 'Yoga' as a means of compressing one's evolution, it is an intensified and effective effort of the individual at the perfection of the body, mind and soul. Yoga accelerates the evolutionary process as Haridas Chaudhury rightly says : "Yoga is a concentration of centuries of slow evolution into a few years of revolutionary march to capture the 'Kingdom of Heaven'."<sup>6</sup>

The real object of Yoga is to unite man with God through the perfection of the human life. Unless every part of human being, viz., body, mind and soul, is transformed, perfection cannot be complete. That is why Sri Aurobindo preaches Integral Yoga in which besides the perfection of the soul, the perfection of the body is given adequate place. In this way the Integral Yoga is a life-long process of perfecting human life in every detail. Sri Aurobindo's Yoga synthesizes the three methods of Yoga<sup>7</sup> which were previously pursued in isolation with one another. Moreover, it is not the perfection or salvation of one or two individuals but of whole human race that is envisaged by his Integral Yoga. Thus, we can rightly say that the sense in which Sri Aurobindo has used the word 'Yoga' does not imply asceticism. On the contrary, it aims at the fulfilment of inner potentialities of body, mind and soul so that a human being may succeed in being a truly realised Sachchidananda in miniature. For this purpose, his Yoga encourages all forms of co-operation of the individuals living in a society.

Sri Aurobindo regards the denial of the development of inherent possibilities of the body, mind and soul as an escape. This kind of escape defeats the purpose of the creation. The purpose behind the creation has been the constantly increasing realisation of the potentialities of the Sachchidananda hidden in this universe. The fulfilment of this purpose lies in the realisation of the Sachchidananda in the human being. This is the greatest goal

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6. Sri Aurobindo : The Prophet of Life Divine, p. 42.

7. These three methods of Yoga are : Yoga of Divine Knowledge (Jnana Yoga), Yoga of Divine Works (Karma-Yoga) and of Divine Love (Bhakti-Yoga).

placed before us. This goal will be achieved by the Superman and the divine life will be established here on earth.

Sri Aurobindo's ideal of human life is, in fact, an integral one in the sense that there is sufficient and legitimate scope for the perfection of both the worldly life and spiritual life. He criticises in this connection the blunder of both the East and the West. The East in quest of the spirit neglected worldly life and material progress altogether. In the same way, the west devoted its whole attention to the betterment of worldly life at the cost of spiritual aspiration of man. They have generally tended to regard Matter and Spirit as two irreconcilable opposites. However, Sri Aurobindo holds that they are not two contradictories but the two ends of one and the same chain interlinked by such terms as Life, Mind and Supermind and that the perfection of the spirit on the one hand, and the perfection of the life in world on the other, are the two phases of the intended manifestation of the Sachchidananda in this world. He says : 'they (Spirit and Life) are not incompatible with each other, rather their divergence has to be healed and both have to be included and reconciled in our view of the future.'<sup>8</sup>

The very definition of life by Sri Aurobindo proves that there can be no contradiction between life and spirit. Thus he writes : "Life is surely nothing but the creation and active self-expression of man's spirit, powers, capacities, his will to be and think and create and love and do and achieve."<sup>9</sup> Sri Aurobindo always stood for vigorous and all-round development of life. His definition of Yoga not only excludes asceticism but also regards it (asceticism) as 'an offence to the reason, almost a crime.'

As a matter of fact, the tendency to renounce worldly life is born in the wrong attitude that this world is illusory or unreal. The natural consequence of such an attitude is the search for liberation from the bondage of the physical world and to seek bliss in some one state of self-extinction such as *Nirvana* or *Moksha*. Most of the spiritual seekers have cherished this attitude. Sri Aurobindo questions this attitude and presents his ideal in the following words,

8. Messages of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother (II Series), p. 21.

9. The Foundations of Indian Culture, p. 210.

'One man or another may get indeed this featureless *Moksha*, but that is the gain? The Brahman, the self, God are always there. What God wants in man is to embody Himself here in the individual and in the community, to realise God in life'.<sup>10</sup>

According to Sri Aurobindo, a spirituality which preaches self-extinction or escape from this world as the goal of life is not a true spirituality. A true spirituality embraces practical and vigorous life in full. He says that as the mountain peaks cannot stand on clouds so also spirituality cannot flourish in a void of life. Life is the base on which the spirituality survives.

The fact that spirituality has been the dominating factor in India's culture, has been interpreted by some adverse critics of India to mean that India has never been civilized and that she has been the home of asceticism. In reply to such false charges, Sri Aurobindo says that though India has been largely spiritually disposed, her spirituality did not mean 'a remote metaphysical mind or the tendency to dream rather than to act.'<sup>11</sup> Metaphysics combined with the vigour of life and action was the real soul of the Indian spirituality. However, here Sri Aurobindo also admits that there were, no doubt, some periods of decadence in India as they are, as a rule, faced by every culture after each period of prosperous flourishing. During such periods of decadence, certain misconception about spirituality took hold of people's mind. Consequently they resorted to ascetic life. It is on this point, that Sri Aurobindo explains his own conception of true spirituality. He says: 'Spirit without mind, spirit without body is not the type of man; therefore, a human spirituality must not belittle the mind, life or body or hold them of small account.'<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting here to note that although both the materialist and a true spiritual seeker regard life, mind and body as indispensable, the difference between the two is very vital. The spiritual seeker regards them merely as means to a yet higher end, but a materialist treats them as ends in themselves.

10. 'Bulletin of Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education' (Pondicherry), Vol. XIV, No. 3, (Article : A letter of Sri Aurobindo, p. 4.)

11. Sri Aurobindo : The Renaissance in India, p. 42.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

Sri Aurobindo preached the gospel of the Divine Life on earth. The perfection of the lower being of man, *i.e.*, body constituted the essential part of this life. He had also fully realised the need of a corporate life in a society. As we learn from his writings, ever since 1910 he was thinking in terms of establishing a spiritual commune in one form or other.<sup>13</sup> The Ashram at Pondicherry which Sri Aurobindo has left behind is the fruit of his efforts. This Ashram is striving towards the realisation of such a divine life. Together with spiritual Sadhana, the proper development and education of physical body forms the very important part of the Ashram-life. Besides this, the Ashramites are carrying on all the activities of a modern industrial world: Explaining the life in his Ashram, Sri Aurobindo writes : 'A total perfection is the ultimate aim which we set before us, for our ideal is the Divine Life which we wish to create here, the life of the Spirit fulfilled on earth, life accomplishing its own spiritual transformation even here on earth in the conditions of the material universe. That cannot be unless the body too undergoes a transformation.'<sup>14</sup>

Thus, we see that to interpret the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo as implying asceticism is wholly erroneous. As to the misconception that Sri Aurobindo was an ascetic, the following statement of his own will suffice to remove it. He says: But I had thought that a Yoga which required me to give up the world was not for me. I had to liberate my country. I took to it seriously when I learnt that the same Tapasya which one does to get away from the world can be turned to action'. June 22, 1926.<sup>15</sup>

In this way we see that Sri Aurobindo's greatness lies in his refutation of the renunciation of life which had taken root for some time in India due to the wrong conception of spirituality. In fact, the ascetic attitude has largely been responsible for retarding India's scientific and industrial progress. Sri Aurobindo's attempt at refutation of asceticism is the most forceful in the history of modern India.

13. Sri Aurobindo Circle Number 8th (Bombay) A.B. Purani's article 'Sri Aurobindo and his Yoga' p. 151.

14. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on Education, p. 43.

15. Quoted from A.B. Purani's book "The Life of Sri Aurobindo", p. 120.



However, it is to be acknowledged that although in his early career in India, Sri Aurobindo had participated in the freedom struggle as an aggressive nationalist, after his release in Alipore Bomb Case in 1910, he abandoned active politics and retired to a quiet life in Pondicherry for good. On this account some critics have criticised him and accused him of asceticism. Sri Aurobindo did not accept this criticism on the ground that his Tapasya in Pondicherry was not of an ascetic kind but of a brand of his own invention.



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